QUILLS

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FADE UP:

Slowly in the darkness, we discern the shape of a dungeon door. The clank of a latch turning; a peephole slides open.

CLOSE UP: THE EYES OF A YOUNG GIRL, STARING STRAIGHT AT US

They blink twice, and a pert voice says:

MADELEINE
Your linens, please.

INT. CORRIDOR - THE CHARENTON ASYLUM, 1807 - DAWN

MADELEINE, on tip toe, stares through the peephole of a cell door, her laundry basket balanced on her hip. She's roughly seventeen, a sweet-faced waif with a dirt-smudged face and a ragged maid's cap. A trap in the lower half of the door opens, and through it an unseen hand pushes a bundle of dirty bedsheets. MADELEINE gathers them in her basket, and moves to the next cell.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)
Your linens.

MADELEINE reaches the last door. She glances anxiously up and down the hallway, before sliding open the peephole.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)
Psst. 'S me.

There's a low creak, and the trap at the base of the door slowly rises. A bundle of sheets tumbles out. MADELEINE kneels. There's something bulky hidden in the cloth: it's a thick manuscript, written in an ornate hand. When she sees it, her face lights up.

The peephole slides open from the inside. A single eye stares out: it's bloodshot, and reptilian. A VOICE coos, mellifluous and low:

VOICE (O.S.)
Careful. The ink's still wet.

MADELEINE smiles a mischievous smile.

INT. ANOTHER CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE scurries down the hall, the manuscript peeking out of her basket. She turns a corner into the day room.

INT. DAY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE nudges her way past the LUNATICS. A BONE-THIN MAN counts his own fingers; ANOTHER rolls back and forth on his haunches, hugging himself; a THIRD has cupped his hands over his mouth and practices bird-calls.

As MADELEINE turns a corner, she careens into the ABBE de COULMIER, administrator at the asylum. He's youthful and appealing, with vigor in his step. At the moment--since he's not wearing his formal vestments--he hardly resembles a priest at all. He catches MADELEINE in his arms.

COULMIER
Good morning, Madeleine.

They disentangle; there's an awkward pause.

MADELEINE
Beggin' your pardon, sir.

She tries to bustle on. COULMIER calls after her:

COULMIER
Madeleine---

MADELEINE
Sir?

COULMIER
You shouldn't fraternize with the patients. Especially the Marquis.

MADELEINE feigns wide-eyed innocence:

MADELEINE
Oh, heavens no, I'd never traffic with *him*. They say he ate a baby once--bones and all--clean off a stick.

The ABBE, amused in spite of himself, watches her go. CLEANTE--the "bird man"--tugs at COULMIER, breaking his reverie, and gives a little trill.

COULMIER
What are we today, Cleante? A bull-finch or a grackle?

He ruffles CLEANTE's hair.

EXT. THE ASYLUM GATES - DAWN

MADELEINE slips the manuscript through the wrought-iron gates to a HORSEMAN. The steed charges away in a cloud of dust.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: A PRINTING PRESS

It spews out pages. The manuscript is becoming a book.

CUT TO:

INT. A BOOKSELLER'S SHOP - DAY

A BOOKSELLER in an apron and spectacles pries off the lid of a crate. In it, newly-bound volumes.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BOOK SHOP

CUSTOMERS furtively duck in and out of the shop. Most of the MEN hide their faces behind high collars or umbrellas; most of the WOMEN wear veiled hats. The trade is brisk.

EXT. A BACK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Behind the store, a crowd has secretly gathered: a STABLE BOY, a MILLINER, a SCULLERY MAID, a BUTCHER, and a SOCIETY FOP, to name just a few. A STREET URCHIN is the lookout, keeping a watchful eye out for passing police. The FOP cracks open a copy of the book and starts reading in a loud whisper:

FOP
"Our story concerns young Juliette, as pretty a maid as ever entered a nunnery. She had a body so firm and ripe, it seemed a shame to commit it to God..."

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: THE BOOK

A VOICE reads from the book in stentorian tones:

VOICE (O.S.)
"Breasts of milky white, with nipples as pink as newly-blossomed peonies..."

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. THE EMPEROR'S PALACE - DAY

CONTINUED:

A CABINET MINISTER--MONSIEUR DELBENÉ, a round man with a beak-like nose--reads aloud. Framed in the window, we see the familiar SILHOUETTE of NAPOLEON: a short, stock body and an imperious Roman nose.

DELBENÉ (CONT'D)
"And between the orbs of her dimpled ass,
lay a blushing rosebud, begging to be..."

The CABINET MINISTER shifts nervously in his seat, and looks to the EMPEROR for a signal to keep reading.

DELBENÉ (CONT'D)
"*...plucked.*"

NAPOLEON
(interrupting at last:)
That's enough.

The EMPEROR seizes the book from the MINISTER's hands, and tosses it into the fireplace. For a blistering moment, we see its title: OPUS SADICUM. Then--almost spontaneously--it explodes into a ball of flame.

CUT TO:

EXT. MERCANTILE STREET - DAY

The POLICE CHIEF and his DEPUTIES march toward the BOOKSELLER's.

INT. THE BOOKSELLER'S - CONTINUOUS

The BOOKSELLER watches, helpless, as his shelves are ransacked. Books tumble down in an avalanche. From the store room, the BOOKSELLER's WIFE watches in horror, TWO SMALL CHILDREN hidden in the folds of her skirts.

One OFFICER pries open a floorboard. Beneath it, he discovers more crates filled with the contraband book. The BOOKSELLER turns white, and starts to tremble. The OFFICER slams him up against a wall, and shackles his hands behind his back.

EXT. THE STREETS OF PARIS

A crowd has gathered to watch the raid. As the BOOKSELLER is paraded through the streets in a wooden cart, under arrest, we see a familiar face in the crowd: it's MADELEINE. She watches until the BOOKSELLER is out of sight.

CUT TO:

CONTINUED:

ANGLE ON: A SUMPTUOUS BUFFET

Plum rosettes floating in cognac, braised ham-shank, pastries ribboned with icing, even a tray of steamed rhododendrons. RENEE PELAGIE DE MONTREUIL, an ample woman in her middle years, piles her plate high with delectables.

INT. A SUN-DRENCHED ARBORETUM

Sitting near-by, a trio of SOCIETY LADIES: MADAME BOUGIVAL, who has all the charm and tact of a cobra; the phlegmatic MADEMOISELLE CLAIRWIL, and the aging MADAME DE CHAMPVILLE.

MADEMOISELLE CLAIRWIL
I hear tell, his latest novel drove men to murder, and women to miscarry.

MADAME BOUGIVAL
(with a wicked smile)
It found its way to many a bedside table, that I don't doubt!

MADEMOISELLE CLAIRWIL nods sadly toward RENEE PELAGIE.

MADAME DE CHAMPVILLE
His pitiful wife! She's become notorious, through no fault of her own.

MADEMOISELLE CLAIRWIL
I can't believe she has the nerve to show herself in polite company.

MADAME BOUGIVAL
I wonder if he ever first acted his stories upon her...

MADAME DE CHAMPVILLE
Euphrosiné! For shame!

RENEE PELAGIE strides over and takes a seat among the LADIES. She spoons a little creme glacé for the papillon in her arms, who laps it up with an adorable pink tongue. A mischievous MADAME BOUGIVAL clears her throat.

MADAME BOUGIVAL
(to Renee Pelagie)
Madame de Montreuil! Do tell; have you read interesting books of late?

RENEE PELAGIE turns white. MADEMOISELLE CLAIRWIL giggles. MADAME DE CHAMPVILLE starts snickering, too, in spite of herself. MADAME BOUGIVAL soaks up the laughter as if it were applause meant for her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

From RENEE's point of view, the guffawing women resemble a gallery of grotesques. Her eyes well with tears.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ROYAL CABINET - PARIS - DAY

MONSIEUR DELBENÉ addresses Napoleon's MINISTRY, a distinguished body of grey-haired gentlemen.

DELBENÉ
The novel's scandalous tone--its lewd subject matter and its over-ripe prose--reveal it to be the work of the infamous Marquis; an author as perverted as he is prolific. He composes his prose--appropriately enough--from the turret of a madhouse.

There's a loud clamor from the ASSEMBLY, and MONSIEUR DELBENÉ pounds his gavel to restore order.

DELBENÉ (CONT'D)
To rectify the situation--to quell the Marquis' quill, and bring dignity back to the Charenton Asylum--

MONSIEUR DELBENÉ gestures across the hall to DR. ROYER-COLLARD. The DOCTOR is in his early fifties, impeccably groomed, with a square jaw.

DELBENÉ (CONT'D)
--the Emperor duly appoints as her new Director a man of impeccable acumen and high moral resolve: Dr. Royer-Collard.

A smattering of applause. DR. ROYER-COLLARD takes the podium. He has the polished grace of a seasoned politician.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I hope you won't accuse me of grandiosity if I suggest that Charenton is my France, and I am her Napoleon.

Polite laughter ripples through the room.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ASYLUM RECTORY - LATER

COULMIER stands high on a library ladder, shelving books. PITOU--a skeletal man with sad, saucer eyes--passes him a volume. COULMIER checks the author's name on the binding:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COULMIER
Good, Pitou. Now back to the book cart; fetch "C" for "Chavigny."

PITOU obeys. MADELEINE appears at the base of the ladder.

MADELEINE
Beggin' your pardon, Father--

COULMIER
Yes?

MADELEINE
There's a terrible rumor afoot in the ward.

COULMIER descends a few rungs.

COULMIER
And what's that?

MADELEINE
That you've been ousted by the Emperor.

COULMIER
(hiding his irritation:)
No one's been ousted, Madeleine.

MADELEINE
But he's sending some high-minded Doctor to take your place--

COULMIER
The Doctor will *augment* my role here. I'm a man of God; he's a man of Science.

MADELEINE
So which d'ya think is the better cure?

COULMIER smiles; he likes MADELEINE's inquisitive nature.

COULMIER
All things in equal measure, Madeleine.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE PANTHEMONT CONVENT - DAY

Nuns, like a flock of black crows, waft past in formation.

EXT. THE CONVENT ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

DR. ROYER-COLLARD stands beneath the convent's trellis, and pounds on the door. It opens, revealing SISTER NOIRCEUIL, a severe-looking nun in a wimple.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL
Yes?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I've come for my bride.

INT. THE HALLS OF PANTHEMONT - CONTINUOUS

SISTER NOIRCEUIL leads DR. ROYER-COLLARD down the corridor; a heavy set of keys dangles from the belt around her waist.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL
We'd not expected you for some time. Simone has only just come of age.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Life's offered me a sudden change in station. I'm to move to Saint-Maurice within a fortnight.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL
So soon?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
A new post; a strange town. I'll need the comfort a young wife affords me.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL swings open a door, and they enter the room of the convent's ward, SIMONE.

INT. SIMONE'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

They interrupt the GIRL in prayer; she rises, and dusts off her skirt. With her doe-like eyes and cherubic skin, she could be the DOCTOR's daughter as readily as his WIFE.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL
Good morning, child. You remember Dr. Royer-Collard.

SIMONE blushes, and casts her eyes downward.

SIMONE
I'd not soon forget the man to whom I was promised.

CONTINUED:

SISTER NOIRCEUIL
He's come to collect you. I'd best gather your things.

SIMONE
(with alarm:)
Today? This very moment?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
My apologies, Mademoiselle; I'd no time to write.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL
It's my experience that most poor girls who are orphaned never wed; They always wind up spinsters, or worse still... *nuns.*

SISTER NOIRCEUIL pulls a small valise from beneath the bed, and starts to fill it with a few stray garments.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL (CONT'D)
Thank God that Fortune has spared you from such a Fate.

Obediently, SIMONE sinks to her knees again, and begins mouthing her prayers even more urgently than before.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: A SCALE MODEL OF A LUXURIOUS MANSION

An exquisite doll-house, each floorboard, each drapery rendered with detail.

INT. AN ARCHITECTURAL FIRM - DAYS LATER

DR. ROYER-COLLARD hovers over the model with a dimpled young architect named MONSIEUR PROUIX.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You're to humor my wife in all things. If she wants a marble portico, she's to have it. Italian tile, Dutch velvet; spare no expense.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
I'll indulge her every extravagance; you have my word.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And another thing. In her bedchamber, see to it that the door locks from the outside.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
And not from within?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And on her windows...an iron grate.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
Bars, sir?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
In the convent, Simone was spared the world's temptations. I won't have her falling prey to them now.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
I knew a gentleman who tied a cow-bell around his wife's neck, just to keep sure of her whereabouts.

MONSIEUR PROUIX laughs, lightly. The DOCTOR is not amused.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
She's a rare bird, Monsieur Prouix. I intend to keep her caged.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - A FEW DAYS LATER

In the full light of day, we see that the Charenton Asylum boasts several buildings, replete with topiary and porticoed walkways. It's an airy, appealing place. On the horizon, however, storm clouds ferment.

EXT. THE FRONT STEPS OF CHARENTON - CONTINUOUS

The whole asylum has turned out to welcome the DOCTOR. A QUARTET of PATIENTS plays stringed instruments on an adjacent landing. OTHERS, decked in their purest whites, line the steps.

COULMIER's in full vestments today. He nudges BOUCHON, a burly inmate with a Neanderthal face, and points to his shirt-front. BOUCHON glances down; he's missed a few buttons. Hastily, he fixes himself. COULMIER nods his approval; BOUCHON grins, pleased with himself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Four black carriages approach the circular drive. The first three are loaded with luggage and furnishings; the last contains the DOCTOR, and is driven by his private COACHMAN, a corpulent man with pockmarks.

FOOTMEN approach to assist in unloading packages. The DOCTOR disembarks. COULMIER approaches, extending his hand.

COULMIER
May I be the first to welcome you to Charenton.

INT. THE FOYER AT CHARENTON - CONTINUOUS

The STAFF OF CHARENTON--PRIESTS, GUARDS, COOKS, and MAIDS--lines the great staircase. DR. ROYER-COLLARD ascends the steps, COULMIER at his heels. They stop at VALCOUR.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Valcour, the prefect.

The DOCTOR leans into VALCOUR, and whispers sotto voce:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Begin a routine search of all parcels which enter and leave the premises.

VALCOUR nods; the PAIR moves up to the next landing. They stop at a muscular bald man in a leather apron and tool belt.

COULMIER
Orvolle, our groundskeeper.

Again, the DOCTOR engages ORVOLLE in a private tete-a-tete:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Inspect the premises for any loose stones which might permit the passage of a manuscript.

ORVOLLE nods. The TWO MEN continue up the stairs, stopping next at an OLD WOMAN with a hunchback and milky white eyes.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
Is she ward, or staff?

COULMIER
Madame Leclerc, the laundress.

MADELEINE, standing next to her mother, pipes up:

CONTINUED: (2)

MADELEINE
She's stone blind, owing to the lye in her laundry kettles. Soaking sheets for lunatics cost this poor woman her sight.

COULMIER shoots MADELEINE a look that says "behave yourself."

COULMIER
Her daughter, Madeleine.

The DOCTOR appraises her with a cool eye, then turns to COULMIER.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Perhaps you'll favor me with a tour of the grounds.

INT. THE CORRIDORS OF CHARENTON - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER leads the DOCTOR through the administrative wing. ONE PRIEST updates records at a tall desk. ANOTHER pours through medical journals; OTHERS whisper among themselves.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
I understand the Marquis falls under your exclusive dominion.

COULMIER
My fellow priests found him too taxing a patient. Father Lely now slaughters pigs in Provence. Father Couvrat is a chimney sweep. And they say Father Buffier buried himself alive, rather than minister to the Marquis, in hopes of achieving martyrdom through less rigorous means.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And you?

COULMIER
I welcome the challenge.

INT. THE DAY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They file past PATIENTS, who nod politely. Everyone's putting their best foot forward today.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
The Marquis' life story reads like a primer in crime. At sixteen, he violated a young serving girl with a crucifix. After six months in the dungeon at
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COULMIER (cont'd)
Vincennes, he mutilated a prostitute, slicing her flesh with a razor, then cauterizing the wounds with wax.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
So he practices what he preaches?

COULMIER
The Marquis is many things Doctor. Irascible. Obscene. Infantile. But he is not a hypocrite.

COUMIER swings open a heavy door for the DOCTOR:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
In his books, he's created an inverse religion. And he is its devoted acolyte.

INT. A COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

As they stroll, DR. ROYER-COLLARD observes one LUNATIC on a bicycle; ANOTHER pushes a wooden hoop with a stick; and a small TRIO passes a medicine ball in a circle.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Has he ever attempted escape?

COULMIER
A man of his notoriety? He wouldn't last a day on the streets without capture.

The ABBE reaches for a brass key ring, and opens an imposing iron gate; it gives an agonizing creak.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Better to live out your days in a hospital than a commonplace prison, yes?

INT. THE MEDICINAL WING - CONTINUOUS

PATIENTS take steam in Turkish baths. DR. ROYER-COLLARD dabs his forehead with a handkerchief.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
What is his current course of treatment?

COULMIER
Seclusion, save for his noon meal. A frigid bath daily, and twice a week a good, strong purgative.

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You've never taken more definitive measures?

COULMIER
Such as--?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
In my day, patients were bled, consigned to the pit, or--if their behavior warranted--they were flogged at the stake.

COULMIER
Those methods have been discredited, Doctor. Treat a man like an animal, and he'll become one.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And what are your preferred prescriptions?

COULMIER
The latest medicinal cures, to start.

COULMIER swings open the next door:

INT. APOTHECARY - CONTINUOUS

ONE PRIEST mashes herbs; ANOTHER distills liquid in a beaker.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Opiates and bromides as required. We've a surgeon on staff, and a phrenologist as well. But we treat more than the body at Charenton, Doctor. We treat the soul.

INT. THE MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A PATIENT plays the harpsichord, while OTHERS learn to dance in pairs.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
You want to teach a man civility? Surround him by it, and he'll learn soon enough.

INT. THE LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

PATIENTS sit at tables, hunched over books.

CONTINUED:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
The torpid brain requires stimulation, and so we school our patients here. And to keep their bodies fit, we have our own vegetable garden and granary.

INT. THE ART STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

They enter a cheery, sun-drenched room with a sky-light. PATIENTS are dressed in smocks, painting at easels.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
And a few of our wards reveal in watercolors what they can't or won't...say in words.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
So art is the mind's salvation, is it?

COULMIER
It can be.

COULMIER stops at DAUPHIN, a cheerful lunatic with a paint smudge on his nose and a marked cranial deformity.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Dauphin's become quite the draughtsman.

The DOCTOR steps forward to inspect DAUPHIN's painting. It's a landscape: a desperate father is shepherding his children out of a burning house, his robes ablaze.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
His work hardly suggests recovery.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
On the contrary. Now Dauphin paints fires; he used to set them.

DAUPHIN giggles and plays peek-a-boo with his hands. COULMIER and the DOCTOR move on, pausing before a set of doors.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
And now if you'll permit me...the jewel in our crown.

He swings them open; the TWO MEN enter.

INT. THE LITTLE THEATER - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER and the DOCTOR file past rows of empty velvet seats.

CONTINUED:

COULMIER
The little theater. Our performances are more than just a source of revenue.

COULMIER gestures toward the stage, where a CAST OF PATIENTS rehearses a tableau vivant, based on *Napoleon's Battle of the Nile* by William Anderson, complete with paper waves and model boats on stilts.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
They allow our wards to exorcise even their most primitive emotions under the guise of drama.

COULMIER gestures toward the director, a dyspeptic lunatic named FRANVAL.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Well done, Franval! Bravo!

FRANVAL smiles humbly, revealing crooked, misshapen teeth.

INT. THE ASYLUM CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER swings open the doors to the chapel:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
And when all else fails, there's always God's comfort.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD scans the Saints who line the knave; ST. THERESA, writhing in ecstasy; ST. SEBASTIAN, his body pierced by arrows; ST. LUCY, with her eyes gouged out; and ST. AGATHA, who holds her breasts on a silver tray.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Hmm. Yes. The solace of the church.

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - CONTINUOUS

The tour ends in the DOCTOR's new office. Unpacked crates stand in piles. DR. ROYER-COLLARD gestures to a chair; COULMIER sits.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Tell me. What is the impact of all these...*amenities*...upon the Marquis?

COULMIER
He's a walking advertisement for our strategies here. He no longer roars or spits. He no longer scarifies his skin. or molests his fellow wards.

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And his prose?

COULMIER
I encourage him to write. To purge his demons on the page, so he might better control them in life.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And have you read his work?

COULMIER
I have. And I'm pleased to report that his writing has mellowed along with his disposition.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Then perhaps you'll do me the honor of explaining this. It's been newly published; we confiscated it from a bookseller's on the Rue de Grenelle.

The DOCTOR places a copy of the infamous book on the desk. COULMIER's face falls.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
I defy you--in the name of God, France, and all that you hold moral and true--to read it, unmoved.

CUT TO:

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS - THAT NIGHT

COULMIER sits alone in his Spartan quarters, reading by candle-light. It's late; he still has countless pages to go. We hear the tale in the dulcet tones of its author:

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)
"So shameless was the Priest, so heedless of his vows, that he administered Communion with a harlot under his robes..."

COULMIER takes off his spectacles, dusts them, slips them back on his nose, and turns the page.

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)
"As he poured Christ's blood into a silver chalice and drank, she imbibed a liquid no less divine..."

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - THE NEXT MORNING

MADELEINE is slipping fresh linen through the traps in each cell door. She reaches the last one.

MADELEINE
Fresh linens.

Without warning, a HAND reaches out to grab hers. It's heavily powdered, and wears an opulent ring, with an arachnid trapped in amber. We hear a voice, mellifluous and low.

THE MARQUIS
I'm hungry for a proper visit.

MADELEINE
(holding her own)
Don't even start--

THE MARQUIS
You've a skeleton key for the pantry, and the linen cupboard. Won't you slip it through my tiny hole?

The HAND lets her go. MADELEINE rises, rolls her eyes, and glances to and fro. She reaches into her apron pocket, and pulls out a key. She inserts it in the lock; it turns.

INT. THE MARQUIS' DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE enters the MARQUIS' lair. On first glance, it's less like a prison cell, and more like the apartment of a faded aristocrat from the days of the Revolution. But as MADELEINE's eyes adjust to the murkiness, she scans the room more closely.

On the walls, sketches of courtesans in a variety of exotic poses, culled from *Justine* and *Juliette*. On the bookshelf, a variety of medical volumes: *Cranial Deformities*, *The History of Madness*, *Lateau's Illustrated Anatomy*, and *Diseases of the Bowel*. Sitting in the corner, a foot-stool carved from human bone. And--atop an ornate wooden desk, mottled with ink-stains--enough quills to feather an ostrich. But no sign of the MARQUIS.

MADELEINE
Marquis? Where'd you get to, then?

Tentatively, MADELEINE proceeds toward the bedroom.

INT. THE MARQUIS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the center of the room, a large canopied bed; its heavy velvet drapes are closed. It beckons to MADELEINE, with the ominous allure of an open casket, or a hollow well. She extends a trembling hand to part the curtains.

CLOSE-UP: MADELEINE'S FEET

Suddenly, two hands shoot out from beneath the bed and grab MADELEINE by the ankles. She screams. The MARQUIS--on his back--slides forward, so he's staring right up her dress.

THE MARQUIS
Your Venus fly-trap! The winking eye of God!

MADELEINE
Filthy old goat!

MADELEINE wrests herself away from him, and spirals back into the drawing room. The MARQUIS drags himself up on all fours, and calls after her:

THE MARQUIS
Did I frighten you?

MADELEINE
You? Frighten me? That's a good one! I'm twice as fast as you are...

INT. THE MARQUIS' DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS rises, and follows her out. When he steps into the room, he's framed by the sunlight streaming from the tiny, barred window in the parapet. We see him fully now for the first time. Given his years of incarceration, he's still dressed in the finery of Louis XIV, though its become frayed and off-color. His wig is immaculately coiffed, but thin with age. His ruffles are worn. Still, there's something sensual about the man; perhaps it's the lingering, odor of decadence, which hangs over him like heavy perfume.

THE MARQUIS
Well.....?

MADELEINE
I suppose you want to know about that silly book of yours.

MADELEINE can't restrain herself any longer; she giggles.

CONTINUED:

MADELEINE (CONT'D)
It sold like the devil, 'fore they burned all the copies.

The MARQUIS swings MADELEINE around in a victory circle.

THE MARQUIS
The peril of composing such incendiary prose!

MADELEINE
I put myself at life'n limb. Surely that's worth a few louis.

The MARQUIS hands her some change.

THE MARQUIS
If only these coins purchased your other talents, too.

MADELEINE
That's not all. There's something else I need from you.

THE MARQUIS
You've already stolen my heart, as well as another more prominent organ, south of the Equator...

MADELEINE
Monsieur Girouard says I'm not to leave without a manuscript.

THE MARQUIS
I've just the story...

The MARQUIS dislodges a stone from the wall. He sticks his arm in the hollow, and roots around. His fingers alight on a crinkled stack of parchment.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
Inspired by these very surroundings.

He blows on the pages, releasing a torrent of dust.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
The unhappy tale of a virginal nursemaid, the darling of the lower wards, where they entomb the hopelessly deranged.

MADELEINE
Is it awfully violent?

CONTINUED: (2)

THE MARQUIS
Most assuredly.

MADELEINE
Is it terribly erotic?

THE MARQUIS
Fiendishly so.

MADELEINE squeals with delight.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
But it comes with a price. *A kiss for each page.*

Now MADELEINE's not so sure. The MARQUIS points a bony finger to his lips.

MADELEINE
Can't I blow them instead?

THE MARQUIS
The price, my coquette, is as firm as my javelin.

MADELEINE
Oh, you. You talk same as you write.

MADELEINE blows a wayward curl from her face, and leans in to kiss THE MARQUIS. As soon as her lips touch his, he grabs her by the head, and thrusts his tongue down her throat. She yanks away, gasping for breath. He smiles and passes her a single page of parchment. She grabs it, spits, and scowls.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - MEANWHILE

COULMIER places the book squarely in the middle of the DOCTOR's desk.

COULMIER
My apologies, Doctor. He's catalogued every known vice, and some as yet unknown.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And to think, only yesterday you labeled him a triumph of rehabilitation.

COULMIER
I spoke out of turn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The DOCTOR rises, and takes a scroll from his desk. He plucks its ribbon, and unfurls the parchment.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The Ministry has offered us a challenge: six months to set Charenton on a straight and narrow course. Otherwise...

COULMIER
Yes?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
She'll be shut down forever by order of the Emperor.

He passes the writ to COULMIER, who stares at it in disbelief.

COULMIER
Shut down?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I'm afraid--in their eyes--the Marquis is the surest barometer of our progress here.

COULMIER's voice rises in protest:

COULMIER
But he's one among two hundred wards--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Regrettably, the remaining one-hundred-and-ninety-nine have failed to command the Emperor's attention.

COULMIER
What of the men we've healed? The lives we've saved?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Private success is less compelling than public failure.

COULMIER
They'd toss out years of practice--years of research--all because of one man?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD shrugs, helplessly.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I can't speak for the Ministry, Father. I am merely their messenger.

CONTINUED: (2)

COULMIER
Do they want him cured? Truly cured? Or do they merely want him silenced?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
A luxurious distinction, I'm afraid. He's placed the entire asylum at peril; our future may lie in the stroke of his pen.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: AN EVER-GROWING PILE OF PAGES

INT. THE MARQUIS' DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE puckers and un-puckers her lips

MADELEINE
It's a long story, this one.

THE MARQUIS
The climax comes at a higher cost!

MADELEINE
What's that?

THE MARQUIS
You must sit on my lap.

MADELEINE mutters as she crawls on his lap:

MADELEINE
You demand a lot from your readers, you do.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CORRIDOR - MEANWHILE

COULMIER marches down the hall, angling for the MARQUIS' cell. There's gravity in his step.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MARQUIS' DRAWING ROOM - MEANWHILE

MADELEINE, perched on the MARQUIS' knee, now holds a very thick manuscript indeed.

THE MARQUIS
The story's thrilling conclusion comes at a premium.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADELEINE
What would that be, pray tell?

THE MARQUIS
(low and hypnotic:)
Your maidenhead. And then you must sew it up as tightly as the day you were born, and come back to me renewed, so I can deflower it a second time.

MADELEINE slides off his lap and slaps him, hard.

MADELEINE
Some things belong on paper, others in life. It's a blessed fool who can't tell the difference.

A key turns in the lock, and the door swings open. It's COULMIER, looking none too pleased. Quickly, MADELEINE conceals the manuscript by shoving it under her blouse.

COULMIER
Mademoiselle Leclerc.

MADELEINE
You're in the nick of it, Abbe. This old lech forgot himself for a moment. He thought I was a character in one of his nasty books!

She heads out the door, clutching the manuscript against her bosom. COULMIER ducks out after her.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

He steals a moment alone with her in the hallway.

COULMIER
Madeleine--

MADELEINE
Yes, Father?

COULMIER
(sternly:)
You ought to visit confession as often as you visit the Marquis' cell.

MADELEINE blushes, and nods.

INT. THE MARQUIS' DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER re-enters the cell.

CONTINUED:

THE MARQUIS
Care for a splash of wine, Abbe?

COULMIER
It's not even noon--

THE MARQUIS
Conversation, like certain portions of the anatomy, always runs more smoothly when it's lubricated.

Glug, glug, glug as the MARQUIS pours two glasses of wine.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
It's a rare vintage from an obscure village in Bordeaux. Rather than crush the grape underfoot, they place the fruit on the belly of a bride and reap its juices when the young husband steers his vessel into port.
(sniffing his glass, rapturously:)
A full-bodied flavor with just a hint of wantonness?

COULMIER
You've been censoring your stories for me, haven't you?

The MARQUIS chokes, and sets down his glass.

THE MARQUIS
I may have deleted the occasional page; you have such a *sensitive* constitution.

COULMIER
You've been slipping the true copies on to your publisher.

THE MARQUIS
Never!

COULMIER goes to the window and glances over the ledge.

COULMIER
What did you do? Toss the manuscript to someone stationed below? Bribe one of the guards?

The MARQUIS starts to protest, then decides not to bother.

CONTINUED: (2)

THE MARQUIS
(casually:)
Did you know that Rabelais once smuggled an entire novel out of France by stitching it in the soles of his shoes?

COULMIER plucks a hand full of quills from the ink stand.

COULMIER
I'm confiscating your paper, and your quills.

THE MARQUIS
You can't be serious.

COULMIER
You've embarrassed me before the Doctor, and the staff.

The MARQUIS realizes COULMIER means business; he lunges for the desk.

THE MARQUIS
But this is unfair; a gross injustice! Have you even read the book in question?

COULMIER
I have.

THE MARQUIS
Did you read every word? Or did you run, straight away, to the dog-eared pages?

COULMIER
My interest was professional, not prurient.

THE MARQUIS
By candlelight, you licked the words off the paper, and rolled them around in your mouth. You swallowed. You succumbed.

COULMIER
While I was reading it, I felt the most intense desire--

THE MARQUIS
To copulate?

COULMIER
No, to *bathe*. On page one, bestiality. Page two, scatology. Page three, cannibalism--

CONTINUED: (3)

THE MARQUIS
You were horrified?

COULMIER
Worse. I was bored.

THE MARQUIS
If such phenomenon exist in nature, then they're fair game in fiction.

COULMIER
You expect me to believe these atrocities *occur?*

THE MARQUIS
We don't run in the same circles, do we?

COULMIER
Frankly, it even fails as craft. Over and over again, the tireless repetition of words like "nipple" and "pikestaff."

THE MARQUIS
There I was taxed; it's true.

COULMIER
And such puny scope! Where are its heroes? Its virtues and triumphs?

THE MARQUIS
It's a work of literature, not a moral treatise.

COULMIER
Isn't that the duty of art? To elevate us above the beast?

THE MARQUIS
I thought that was your duty, Father, not mine. I only meant to entertain.

COULMIER starts plucking quills off the window-sill, the sideboard, and the book-shelf.

COULMIER
I permitted you to write, in hopes in might prove therapeutic; I was a fool.

THE MARQUIS
But my writing's involuntary, like the beating of my heart! I can't help it...

CONTINUED: (4)

COULMIER
Proof positive it's an addiction, and must be cured.

The MARQUIS stamps his feet, a petulant child:

THE MARQUIS
But I'll die of loneliness! I've no company but the characters I create; they may be whores and pederasts but they're the only friends I have left--

COULMIER
It's not just your future that's at stake. The Ministry's threatened us with closure. What of the other patients? They've no place to go, no manner in which to clothe or feed themselves---

THE MARQUIS
FUCK 'EM! They're half-wits and pin-heads; let' em die on the streets, as Nature intended.

COULMIER
You among them?

COULMIER pulls open a drawer on the desk. In it, bottles of ink. He starts to fill his pockets.

THE MARQUIS
I'll write nothing but dainty stories, just to please you! Odes to virtue!

COULMIER
And in a moment, fifty pigs will fly out of your closet and start singing the *Dies Irae.*

The MARQUIS drops to his knees:

THE MARQUIS
You don't know the voices that plague me in my sleep, urging me to commit the most *inhumane*...the most *appalling* acts... mischief with a razor...havoc with a broom handle...

He grabs the hem of COULMIER's robes, and looks up at him with doleful eyes:

CONTINUED: (5)

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
I've all the demons of hell in my head. *My only salvation is to vent them on paper.*

COULMIER's seen histrionics like this before.

COULMIER
Try reciting the catechism instead. It's cheerier, and it's more artfully written.

The MARQUIS scoffs; he knows his little display has failed.

THE MARQUIS
I won't go praying to that God of yours. He strung up his very own son like a side of veal; I shudder to think what He'd do to me.

COULMIER
You know what blasphemy is, don't you? The last refuge of the failed provocateur.

The MARQUIS abruptly switches gears; he has a new idea.

THE MARQUIS
I have a proposition.

COULMIER
You always do.

THE MARQUIS
Madeleine.

COULMIER
What of her?

THE MARQUIS
I've seen the way you eye her.

COULMIER
I don't know who you insult more; her or me.

THE MARQUIS
I'm sure I could convince her to hike up her skirts on your behalf--

COULMIER
That's enough.

CONTINUED: (6)

THE MARQUIS
THEN BUGGER ME!

COULMIER
(unfazed)
Good day, Marquis.

Unable to reign himself in any longer, the MARQUIS explodes; he tears at his own hair, and pounds his fist into the wall so the knuckles bleed.

THE MARQUIS
YOU PIOUS LITTLE WORM!

COULMIER knows enough to exit; he locks the door behind him.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

From inside his cell, the MARQUIS pounds on the door.

THE MARQUIS (O.S.)
TURN-KEY! MAGGOT!

COULMIER pauses. He hears the sliding of the peep-hole in the door. He turns back to see the MARQUIS staring at him through the tiny slit.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
Where there's a will, there's a way.
And a maniac is matchless for invention.

The peephole slams shut.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - A SHORT TIME LATER

COULMIER empties a bundle onto the DOCTOR's desk: quills of every kind: ostrich, turkey, goose and quail. Ink wells, too--some a brilliant blue, others maroon, or black.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Well done, my friend.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD plucks one of the quills from the bin, and twirls it in his hand.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
Very well done indeed.

CUT TO:

A DISTANT VISTA

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On the horizon against the morning sun, laborers are erecting the skeletal outline of an enormous chateau.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

EXT. A SMALL TENT, WITH A TABLE AND DRAFTING SUPPLIES.

MONSIEUR PROUIX is surrounded by stone samples and bolts of cloth, presented for DR. ROYER-COLLARD's inspection.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
For a woman of humble origin, your wife has the most luxurious tastes!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
She's spent her life in a convent; small wonder she's starved for beauty.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
But Peruvian marble? It costs a fortune to import.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Simone's a mere child. She knows nothing of cost.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
That much is painfully clear--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I trust you are discreet, Monsieur Prouix.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
(intrigued:)
Yes, of course.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
She has granted me her youth, her beauty, her chastity. What can I proffer in return? I'm twice her age. I've ripped her from the only home she's ever known, to bring her here, to this God-forsaken place.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD gazes at HIS WIFE. She sits a few feet away under a parasol, a vision from Watteau. The sight raises a lump in the DOCTOR's throat.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
If I'm not careful, it's only a matter of time before...

CONTINUED:

He reddens, and turns back to PROUIX:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
You must design a home so sumptuous that she is never inclined to leave it.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
With all due respect, sir, your resources are finite--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I'm well aware of my own finances.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
I'm an architect; not a magician. I can barely afford lumber, let alone *Peruvian marble*--

The DOCTOR shoots MONSIEUR PROUIX a look that silences him mid-stream.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - THAT AFTERNOON

A carriage screeches to a halt before the entrance. Out steps a WOMAN, cloaked in black. She slips down her hood; it's an ashen-faced RENEE PELAGIE.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - MINUTES LATER

RENEE fights back a groundswell of emotion.

RENEE PELAGIE
I have paid in blood, sir, for the mere fact I am the Marquis' wife and he my husband!

The DOCTOR reaches across the desk, placing his hand on hers.

RENEE PELAGIE (CONT'D)
The other evening I sought asylum in church. There, I pleaded for absolution for my husband's sins. "Father," I cried, "grant me mercy, please! My own sins are burden enough!" When I left, the very pew in which I sat was yanked from the floor by a trio of priests and carried into the courtyard. There--as they intoned the sacred rite of exorcism--they
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RENEE PELAGIE (cont'd)
burned the very wood I had sullied with my behind!

RENEE bursts into tears.

RENEE PELAGIE CONT'D)
Even the children have a nickname for me. They call me *"Satan's Bride."*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Careful, Madame. Women who take to screaming in these halls often land themselves in leg irons.

RENEE PELAGIE
I'm no stranger to such contraptions, Doctor.

This gives the DOCTOR due pause; he passes a handkerchief to RENEE. She blows her nose.

RENEE PELAGIE (CONT'D)
For my sake if not for his--if not for all of France--*you must cure him of his foul compulsion to write!*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD glances for a moment at the MODEL HOUSE, now sitting on his desk. He straightens a tiny sofa.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Are you prepared to buttress your entreaties with the means to oblige them?

RENEE PELAGIE
Excuse me?

Dr. ROYER-COLLARD rises, circling RENEE-PELAGIE's chair.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Charenton relies on the munificence of those who would support her cause. If you're truly determined to step out of the long, dark shadow of your husband's celebrity--

RENEE PELAGIE
Oh, but I am!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
--words alone are insufficient.

RENEE PELAGIE
It's beyond perversity. That honor should carry a price tag.

CONTINUED: (2)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Picture it. A summer's tea. Linens, strewn. An array of succulents. Old friends, once again deigning to kiss your hand.

The DOCTOR bows on bended knee, and kisses her hand.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
"Why, Marquise. Enchanted to see you. Welcome back from your long, dark descent into the abyss of infamy."

RENEE PELAGIE
Don't toy with me, Doctor.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Now is the time to secure your epitaph. Reneé Pelagie Cordier de Montreuil...or *"Satan's Bride."*

A torturous moment for RENEE PELAGIE. Her hands fidget, and her eyes dart about like tiny little fish in big, glass bowls.

EXT. THE FRONT STEPS OF CHARENTON - LATER

The DOCTOR escorts RENEE out to her carriage.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I am eternally in your debt.

RENEE PELAGIE
And I in yours.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Rest assured that your generosity speeds your husband ever faster toward a cure.

RENEE pauses, staring up at the tower window. The MARQUIS looms behind the curtain in silhouette.

RENEE PELAGIE (CONT'D)
Doctor?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Madame?

RENEE PELAGIE
Can I impart to you his cruelest trick?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Of course.

CONTINUED:

RENEE PELAGIE
Once...long ago...in the folly of youth...*he made me love him.*

ANGLE ON A PARAPET

The MARQUIS has disappeared; the lace billows silently in the breeze.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BUILDING SITE - DAY

Under the awning, DR. ROYER-COLLARD and MONSIEUR PROUIX. On a table, blueprints unfurled.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
The rather dramatic increase in funds behooves us both.

The DOCTOR steps out to examine the site. Stone masons and carpenters scurry about; the house is taking shape.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Yours is an enviable profession, Monsieur Prouix.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
Mine, sir?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Yes indeed. You fabricate the design, but you leave the execution to others. You never hoist a stone, or drive a nail.

The DOCTOR smiles; he likes the idea.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
That's the true measure of a man's authority, isn't it?

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: NAPOLEON, POSING IN HIS HAT WITH HIS SWORD

Or is it?

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM'S LITTLE THEATER - DAY

The PATIENTS are performing, creating a tableau vivant based on Baron Gros' painting of *Napoleon Visiting the Plague*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Victims of Jaffa. A faux Napoleon, his hands outstretched, greets the writhing masses against a storm-tossed sky.

The audience is full of the HAUTE BOURGEOISIE. Sitting in a box, DR. ROYER-COLLARD and his wife SIMONE. She laughs and applauds; his face is locked in a scowl.

INT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

The lunatic BOUCHON stands on the catwalk, operating a thunder sheet with gusto. His eyes are fixed on MADELEINE, who stands below, ironing a costume. From his bird's eye view, he can see her cleavage straining against her dress. It makes him drool; he rattles the thunder sheet even louder.

INT. LITTLE THEATER - ON THE AISLE

COULMIER notices that the thunder has abruptly stopped.

INT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

BOUCHON pushes MADELEINE hard against a stone wall, yanking up her skirts. With a visceral grunt, he gropes her beneath her petticoat. She gives a sharp yelp, and reaches for the iron, still red-hot. COULMIER turns the corner with VALCOUR.

COULMIER
Bouchon!

MADELEINE presses the hot iron against BOUCHON's cheek.

BOUCHON
Ahhhhhggggg....

He grabs his face in pain, and leaps back. VALCOUR grabs him.

COULMIER
Take him to the infirmary for a plaster, and an ice bath. That'll cool him.

VALCOUR drags a quivering BOUCHON away.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
You must try and forgive Bouchon. He's not a man, he's an overgrown child.

MADELEINE
He had the grope of a man.

COULMIER
Come now. Dry your tears.

CONTINUED:

MADELEINE
His stinking breath caused my eyes to run, that's all.

MADELEINE glances at him; her eyelashes are dewy with tears.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)
It's true what the lunatics say, Abbe. You are the kinder man.

COULMIER smiles, then kisses her on the forehead. She clutches him in a hug. It lasts longer than COULMIER expects, broken only by the sound of clapping.

INT. LITTLE THEATER - OUT FRONT

The LUNATICS stand in the footlights, accepting applause.

EXT. THE ASYLUM STEPS - NIGHT

DR. ROYER-COLLARD and SIMONE make a bee-line for their carriage. COULMIER chases after them.

COULMIER
It's meant to flatter the Emperor, not to ridicule him--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
In case you haven't heard, Abbe, we already have what might politely be referred to as "a public relations problem."

SIMONE casts a sympathetic look in COULMIER's direction, just as DR. ROYER-COLLARD boosts her into the carriage. Before boarding himself, he turns to COULMIER.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
We'll suspend performances. At least for now.

The DOCTOR bolts away, dust and gravel flying in his wake. COULMIER watches him go, irritated. An eager FRANVAL appears, carrying an opening night bouquet.

FRANVAL
Tell the truth; was the Doctor awfully impressed?

COULMIER
Yes; I'm afraid he was.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - NEXT EVENING

MADELEINE pushes a rickety cart down the hall, pulling dinner trays from it, and shoving them through the trap doors. She reaches the MARQUIS' cell. He slides open his peep-hole. His voice has the desperate rasp of a man in withdrawal.

THE MARQUIS
Can you smuggle a paper and quill to me?

MADELEINE
If only! The new Doctor, he'd do more than chastise me. He'd flay me alive!

THE MARQUIS
A man after my own heart...

MADELEINE
I'm sorry. Truly.

MADELEINE shoves the tray under his door, gives him an apologetic look and trundles on her way.

INT. THE MARQUIS' CELL - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS takes his tray, and plops it on his writing desk. Wine from the carafe sloshes out, and a few drops land on his cloth napkin.

He stares for a moment at the pattern of the burgundy drops against the clear white of the linen. He traces a finger along the splotch. His face lights up. He grabs the carafe in one hand. He has an idea.

INT. THE MARQUIS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

He steps into the room. In front of him, his bed. The sheets are stretched against it immaculately: not so much as a single wrinkle. Inch after inch of pure white; a beautiful blank page. The MARQUIS smiles.

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS rips into his roast chicken with his hands; he ferrets out a bone. Next, he takes a tiny carving knife, and whittles away at the bone, sharpening its point and hollowing its marrow. Voila. A make-shift quill. He dips it into the carafe. Next, he tries a few strokes on the bedsheet draped over his desk. It makes a clean, bold line.

He gasps with relief; at last! His eyes fill with grateful tears, and he hugs himself in the night air.

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - NIGHT

One lamp burns in the darkness in the MARQUIS' chamber. We hear him giggling away, a man content.

CUT TO:

ESTABLISHING SHOT: THE DOCTOR'S VILLA - NIGHT

A modest stone affair with a small, ivy-covered coach house.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (V.O.)
I trust you'll be comfortable here, until our own home is properly acquitted.

SIMONE (V.O.)
I should think so, yes.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The genteel ping of silverware against china. A expansive table separates DR. ROYER-COLLARD from his wife, SIMONE. She's barely touched her quail.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I'd prefer to have our brandy in the drawing room. There we can sit...side-by-side...before the fire.

SIMONE
I'd rather read, thank-you.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You prefer a book to your husband's company?

SIMONE glances down at her hands, trembling in her lap. She can't bring herself to answer.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
I've lost my bride to literature. Well, no wonder; I'm only flesh and blood. That's no match--is it?--for the printed page.

He stands, sullen, and tosses his napkin onto his plate.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
Good evening, then. I hope you enjoy your solitude.

He stalks out.

CONTINUED:

CUT TO:

INT. THE VILLA LIBRARY - MINUTES LATER

SIMONE scans the bookshelf; she climbs a small step-ladder to extract a copy of *A Lady's Garden of Verse*. When she pulls the book down, she notices another book wedged behind it. She reaches for that one, curious. When she begins to read it, her eyes grow wide with wonder.

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)
"To the young maidens of the world: wrest yourselves free from the tyranny of virtue, and taste without shame the succors of the flesh..."

SIMONE sinks to the foot-stool, where she sits, absorbed.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DOCTOR'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

The canopy around the bed is closed. Behind it, in silhouette, SIMONE is still reading.

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)
"Male power lies in the clench of a man's fist..."

NEW ANGLE: INSIDE THE CANOPIED BED - CONTINUOUS

Dressed only in a night-gown, SIMONE holds the book in one hand and a candle in the other. The flame casts flickers across her pale face.

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)
"...but a woman's power lies elsewhere; *in the velvet cavity betwixt her thighs...*"

The sound of foosteps. The bedroom door opens; SIMONE blows out her candle. Through the curtain, she sees the looming shadow of her husband, carrying a taper of his own. She closes the book, and thrusts it under the pillow. DR. ROYER-COLLARD parts the drapes.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I apologize if I took a severe tone. Perhaps the Sisters failed to instruct you in the ways of marriage; the nightly duty of a wife to her husband.

He crosses to his side of the bed, and sits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
You can't be blamed for your naiveté, not when it's chief among your charms.

His hand falls on the pillow; there's something under it.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
What's this?

SIMONE doesn't answer. DR. ROYER-COLLARD pulls out the book. He sees the title, and stands. He takes SIMONE by the chin, and raises her face to his. She squirms.

SIMONE
I found it, quite by mistake...

Suddenly--with force--the DOCTOR slams the book against her face. She collapses into the bedding in tears. Methodically, the DOCTOR begins tearing pages from the novel; they scatter to the floor...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Better you'd betrayed me with a man.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MARQUIS' DRAWING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Sunlight falls in a crisscross pattern through the grate on the MARQUIS' window. He snores, asleep at his desk. A knock on the door.

MADELEINE (V.O.)
Your linens!

His eyes snap open.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE pounds again.

MADELEINE
Now or never!

The trap opens, and sheets pour out. MADELEINE gathers them, and notices something odd. Her face lights up with amazement. She unfurls the top sheet. It's covered in tiny cursive.

CUT TO:

INT. MADELEINE'S QUARTERS - THAT NIGHT.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Crouched at the kitchen table in their threadbare apartment, MADELEINE and her mother, MADAME LECLERC. MADELEINE's reading aloud from the bedsheet by a blazing fire:

MADELEINE
"Long ago, Satan concocted a ludicrous fable, so bizarre it defied refutation. A carpenter, cuckolded by a lecherous God. A deluded virgin. A squalling babe, born among pigs. And then Satan adopted this humble guise: A white robe, and a crown of thorns. And he called himself 'Jesus Christ.' With sleight of hand, he turned water into wine. He raised a few carnival mountebanks from the dead. Soon, the masses followed, praising him and waving palms..."

MADAME LECLERC
'Tis a monstrous story!

MADELEINE
Worse than his last, I'll wager!

MADAME LECLERC
Well, what're you waiting for? Go on!

MADELEINE scrambles to find the next sheet.

MADELEINE
"Is there any greater ruse than to launch a false prophet? One who extols the meek above the mighty? What better way to ensure Satan's dominion?..."

CUT TO:

INT. MADELEINE'S QUARTERS - LATER THAT NIGHT

The fire has died down to a few embers. MADELEINE transcribes the last few words from the MARQUIS' sheets onto parchment. MADAME LECLERC snores near-by in her rocking chair. MADELEINE seals the manuscript in a leather sheath.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ASYLUM GATES - DAWN

Again, MADELEINE slips the manuscript to the HORSEMAN.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LAUNDRY - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

MADELEINE sinks the scribbled sheets into a steaming vat of boiling water in the laundry room. She shoves it down with a large stirring stick. The water turns red.

CUT TO:

INT. A LUNATIC'S CELL - NIGHT

PITOU is crouched in the corner of his cell, screaming at a hideous pitch. The door to his cell bursts open. It's VALCOUR in a night-shirt, his sword belted around his waist.

VALCOUR
What're ya screaming after, ya muttonhead?

PITOU points to his rumpled bedding; it's stained the color of blood.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

With a flourish, DR. ROYER-COLLARD unrolls PITOU's bedsheet for MADELEINE's inspection. COULMIER stands by. In the background, MADAME LECLERC toils over a vat. Steam rises, thick as soup.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Your mother may be blind, but you've a keen pair of eyes, haven't you?

MADELEINE
I hope so, sir.

COULMIER glances reprovingly at the DOCTOR, and tries a gentler approach:

COULMIER
Madeleine. Please. What could cause a stain like this?

MADELEINE
I swear I don't know. But it's a lovely shade, if I do say so.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Perhaps your kettles are stained with rust. Maybe the lye's turned rancid. Either way, your work is incompetent.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADELEINE
But sir--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I'd say that merits dismissal of you both,

MADELEINE looks to COULMIER, terror in her eyes.

COULMIER
Doctor, that's absurd--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Quiet, Abbe.

COULMIER
Such a harsh penalty for such a small crime--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The choice is yours, Madeleine. Talk, or you and your mother will be discharged.

COULMIER
You'll get more from her with kindness than you will with force.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You choose your methods, Father, and I'll choose mine. You've only to answer to God; I must answer to Napoleon.

MADELEINE rushes to MADAME LECLERC, and embraces her protectively.

MADELEINE
Please, sir, I beg you! Cast me out on the street, and I'd survive! But my poor Mother? Without her sight and hardly a tooth in her head, she'd soon be dead--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Then would you care to amend your earlier statement?

For an excruciating moment, MADELEINE weighs her options. Then a resolute answer:

MADELEINE
No, Monsieur.

MADAME LECLERC covers her face with her hands, and begins to cry.

CONTINUED: (2)

MADAME LECLERC
That's a fine thing, child; now we're done for...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD starts climbing the stairs toward the exit.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You and yours are to vacate the premises no later than noon---

COULMIER charges after him.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER dogs the DOCTOR all the way down the hall:

COULMIER
You're as merciless with your staff as you are with your wards.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The girl's lying; it shows in her face.

Another VOICE pipes up from behind:

MADELEINE (O.S.)
It was the Marquis.

The TWO MEN turn to see MADELEINE, standing in the hallway, a tiny figure of defeat. DR. ROYER-COLLARD cocks an eyebrow at COULMIER as if to say "I told you so." He turns to MADELEINE:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The Marquis?

MADELEINE nods, wiping away a tear.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The DOCTOR towers over a seated MADELEINE. COULMIER paces.

MADELEINE
After reading them...fearful of their discovery...Mama and I attempted to wash away the words..and so the vats were polluted.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Did any of these writings pass from this place?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADELEINE's lower lip starts to tremble.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
DID ANY OF HIS WRITINGS PASS FROM THIS PLACE?

MADELEINE nods. The DOCTOR slams his fist down hard on the desk. The tiny windows in the MODEL HOUSE tremble and shake.

COULMIER
You've bullied her so badly, she can't think.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The girl's *not your concern.* I'll see to it she's reprimanded.

MADELEINE looks to COULMIER, stricken with fear. He glances back at her, squeezing her shoulder to give her strength.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
You'd best tend to your own charge, yes?

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

COULMIER marches down the hall; behind him, a phalanx of GUARDS. He wears a look of grim determination.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MARQUIS' BEDROOM -- MINUTES LATER

With a loud *rip*, TWO GUARDS tear the sheets off the MARQUIS' bed. COULMIER empties a pillow-case, and straw falls in clumps onto the floor. The MARQUIS watches, incredulous.

COULMIER
From now on, you'll sleep on a bare mattress.

THE MARQUIS
What, and freeze to death?

COULMIER
And for good measure, we'll seize the curtains, the towels and the rugs.

One GUARD pulls down drapery; ANOTHER rolls up the carpet.

INT. THE MARQUIS' DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

With a single swipe of his arm, YET ANOTHER GUARD empties a bookshelf into wheelbarrow. Some of the bindings break, and

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

pages scatter. COULMIER charges in, following by an increasingly frantic MARQUIS.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Your library shall be dismantled; your furniture removed.

THE MARQUIS
My sofa? Even my chairs? Where will I sit?

COULMIER
You might strip the upholstery, and use it for paper.

The MARQUIS watches as his sofa is carried out.

THE MARQUIS
It's a potent aphrodisiac, isn't it?

COULMIER
What's that?

THE MARQUIS
Power over another man.

COULMIER
You drive me to it. By nature, I'm a charitable man.

THE MARQUIS
It's the Doctor, isn't it? You're his sycophant. He cracks the whip and you dance.

COULMIER
The Doctor and I have our differences but on this we agree: *you must be stifled.*

THE MARQUIS
Don't be shy, Coulmier. Jig for me.

COULMIER
The cost of our failure is no less than Charenton herself.

THE MARQUIS
Follow the steps he's taught you; you'd best not improvise--

The MARQUIS begins to dance. COULMIER ignores him.

CONTINUED: (2)

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
Ah-one and a two and a three and a four, and ah-one and a two, and a three and a four--

COULMIER
Bernard. His writing desk.

A GUARD single-handedly picks up the desk, and makes for the door. The MARQUIS decides to "pitch in" with rueful glee. He starts hurling thing around the room.

THE MARQUIS
Take it! Take it all! The andirons! Here; a candlestick--careful, it's slippery, you've no idea where it's been. My snuff box-- a box of Kama Sutra powder, ready to dust whomever you please...

He plucks a small statue of the Virgin Mary from an alcove.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
And we mustn't forget Mary, sweet Mary, the Jewish Whore; God's little harlot!

He tosses it to COULMIER, who catches it.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
Virgin birth--*ha!* An entire religion, built on an oxymoron!

COULMIER
Sacrilege comes as easily to you in conversation as it does upon the page.

THE MARQUIS
An atheist cannot be sacrilegious. The word does not exist in his vocabulary. Sacrilege is the exclusive province of the devout.

COULMIER gives an order to an idle GUARD:

COULMIER
Dubourg, fetch his wine rack.

He turns back to the MARQUIS:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
From now on, you'll have nothing but water at every meal.

CONTINUED: (3)

The MARQUIS makes a grab for his decanter, just as it is whisked away.

THE MARQUIS
No, you can't! Deny me anything but the grape!

COULMIER
Your meat shall be de-boned. You'll have nothing you can fashion as a quill.

THE MARQUIS
Why this sudden torture?

COULMIER
Because your writing continues, unchecked.

The harpsichord goes out the door, followed by a Grecian urn.

THE MARQUIS
It was only for her.

COULMIER
For whom?

THE MARQUIS
The girl. To entice her back to see me.

COULMIER
She won't be paying you any more visits from now on.

The MARQUIS grabs COULMIER by the arm, sinking to his knees.

THE MARQUIS
(a genuine plea:)
Don't. I beg you. Hers is the only tenderness I know. With her help, I may yet find some small measure of redemption.

COULMIER
The purplest prose is always the least sincere.

Enraged now, the MARQUIS scoffs:

THE MARQUIS
Hoarding her all to yourself, eh? Sweet nothings in the confessional?

CONTINUED: (4)

COULMIER
You are *demented--*

THE MARQUIS
You won't defend the Holy Mother, but you'd defend the little privy maid, the scrap of flesh every moron in the place wants to fuck--

Suddenly, COULMIER lunges at the MARQUIS, pinning him to the wall by his neck. The GUARDS all freeze, ready to pounce.

COULMIER
You could drive a sane man to murder, Marquis.

THE MARQUIS
Kill me or take me as I am; I won't change.

COULMIER
I won't kill the man, but I'd do well to kill the author.

COULMIER doesn't blink, while the MARQUIS spits out the following with a mixture of passion and malice:

THE MARQUIS
I didn't create the world; I only record it. From my prison cell at Picpus, I could see the gallows. Day after day during the Terror, I watched the endless procession to the chopping block. Heads, like champagne corks, flying. My only music was the sound of grief. Its melody was the wretched crying of widows and orphaned children; its percussion, the steady rhythm of the falling blade; its bass, the thud of the cadavers as they rolled down the bank into the pit below. *Blood flowed in rivers beneath my window, Abbe.*

A pause. Momentarily overwhelmed by the MARQUIS's words, COULMIER lets him go. The MARQUIS cracks his neck, and straightens his collar.

COULMIER
(subdued now, almost gentle:)
Perhaps it's best not to extrapolate man's character from such miserable surroundings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

THE MARQUIS
Where better?

The MARQUIS mutters with the utmost contempt:

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
Locked in a dungeon, stripped of all postures, man's *true self* surges to the fore.

COULMIER realizes there's no point in arguing any further.

COULMIER
I'm sorry, Marquis. Truly.

He follows the GUARDS out. Alone now, the MARQUIS glances around his cell. In a few short minutes, they've stripped it bare.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS charges out into the hall after COULMIER:

THE MARQUIS
YOU FESTERING LITTLE PUSTULE--

TWO GUARDS grab the MARQUIS, dragging back into his cell. COULMIER holds up one hand, signaling them to stop. They pause, still holding the MARQUIS fast by the arms. The MARQUIS stares at COULMIER fiercely; his eyes are wild.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
In conditions of adversity, the artist thrives.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE COURTYARD - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

The DOCTOR watches from his balcony. Below him, MADELEINE stands on a scaffold. LUNATICS have gathered to watch her punishment in grim silence.

VALCOUR ties each of MADELEINE's wrists to a rough wooden post. He goes behind her, and unbuttons the back of her dress, exposing the tender flesh of her back. Next, he picks up a steel-tipped martinet. He raises it, poised to strike. He looks to the DOCTOR for permission; the DOCTOR grants it. MADELEINE flinches in anticipation of the blow. It comes down, hard.

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - MEANWHILE

In his barren cell, the MARQUIS listens to the crack of the whip in the courtyard below. He whispers something he learned a long time ago:

THE MARQUIS
Don't worry, child. When the skin grows back, it's tougher than before.

INT. THE COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

An angry welt appears on MADELEINE's skin. Then another. She chokes back tears, enduring her punishment with dignity. COULMIER bursts forth from the CROWD.

COULMIER
CUT HER DOWN.

VALCOUR stops short; he turns to the DOCTOR.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
He'll do no such thing.

COULMIER
FREE HER. *NOW.*

The DOCTOR stands, menacingly.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Who's in charge here?

COULMIER whirls around to face the DOCTOR.

COULMIER
It's a weak man who tests his mettle on the backs of children--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
This *child* is nothing less than a criminal--

COULMIER
Madeleine's not wicked. It's the Marquis who's corrupted her. And that's hardly her fault; it's mine. I've not been vigilant enough.

COULMIER turns to VALCOUR, and whispers urgently:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Your dagger. *Give me your dagger.*

CONTINUED:

VALCOUR glances at the DOCTOR; which superior should he honor?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
LEAVE HER DULY STRUNG.

Impulsively, COULMIER reaches out and slides the dagger from VALCOUR's belt. He slices through the rope that binds MADELEINE; she falls into his arms. He turns to the DOCTOR.

COULMIER
If only blood will appease you, then shed mine.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You'd suffer in her stead?

MADELEINE
Abbe, no--

COULMIER
Gladly.

COULMIER proffers both fists to VALCOUR.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Go ahead. Bind them.

Again, VALCOUR looks blank.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Bind them.

Reluctantly, VALCOUR ties COULMIER's hands together. Next, he hikes them over the whipping post. He loosens COULMIER's vestments, stripping him to the waist. MADELEINE watches, her eyes full of fright. The LUNATICS are stone still. VALCOUR raises the martinet, and turns to the DOCTOR a final time for the go-ahead:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
That won't be necessary.

There's a sigh from the CROWD. The DOCTOR stares at the ABBE with steel eyes.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
I trust--in return for the mercy I'm granting you now--I can count on your steadfast allegiance in the future.

MADELEINE looks to the ABBE appreciatively. As VALCOUR frees him, COULMIER mutters to himself:

CONTINUED: (2)

COULMIER
Heaven help me now.

CUT TO:

INT. THE INFIRMARY - LATER THAT DAY

MADELEINE sits nude on the examining table, her legs drawn primly against her chest. A GRIM-FACED NUN prepares salve for the lashes on her back. COULMIER sits behind a small folding screen--for modesty--and talks to MADELEINE.

COULMIER
Had I known your taste in novels, I never would've taught you to read.

MADELEINE
Don't say that; you mustn't say that. It's my salvation, Father. I'll always be grateful.

COULMIER
But how can you--not to mention your mother--indulge in his pornography?

MADELEINE
It's a hard day's wages, sir, slaving away at the behest of madmen. What we've seen in life, it takes a lot to hold our interest.

The NUN presses a sponge against a particularly nasty gash;

MADELEINE (CONT'D)
Ow!

COULMIER
But why heap such ghastly fantasies atop an already ghastly existence?

MADELEINE
We put ourselves in the stories, sir. We play the parts. Each whore, each murderess.

COULMIER
Why not act the role of heroines instead? Queen Esther from the Bible, or even St. Joan?

MADELEINE
(simply:)
If we weren't such bad women on the page,
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADELEINE (cont'd)
Doctor, I'll hazard we couldn't be such good women in life.

The NUN has finished dressing her wounds; MADELEINE stands.

COULMIER'S POV

Through the partition in the screen, COULMIER catches a fleeting glimpse of MADELEINE's body: the upturn of her breasts, the soft slope of her buttocks. He turns away, ashamed that he was spying:

COULMIER
This is no place for a child like you.

EXT. A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN - DAY

MADAME BOUGIVAL clips a rose from a nest of thorns, placing it in her basket. COULMIER trails after her in the sun.

COULMIER
Madeleine's an excellent laundress, and a fine cook. And her mother--in spite of her blindness--can still thread a needle, and sew a perfect seam.

MADAME BOUGIVAL smiles, her voice ripe with insinuation.

MADAME BOUGIVAL
It's charming, Doctor. How you've taken the young girl's cause so closely to heart.

COULMIER
(defensively:)
Charenton is not a safe haven for impressionable minds.

MADAME BOUGIVAL smiles knowingly.

MADAME BOUGIVAL
Yes. Of course.

COULMIER
Well?

MADAME BOUGIVAL
My husband's abroad; he returns in a fortnight. I'll ask; that's all I can promise. To ask.

CUT TO:

EXT. A SEEDY BACKSTREET - PARIS

A carriage stops and a WOMAN disembarks. In her elegant attire--notably the broad-brimmed hat which conceals her face--she's clearly out of place in this neighborhood. She disappears into the doorway of a decrepit store-front.

INT. THE HOVEL - CONTINUOUS

A withered old PAWNBROKER argues with his newly-arrived CUSTOMER; it's none other than SIMONE, the DOCTOR's wife.

PAWNBROKER
But it's me only copy. And in pristine condition.

The PAWNBROKER reaches under the counter, and pulls up a STRONG BOX, with a chain yoking it to the floor.

PAWNBROKER (CONT'D)
Sweet little thing like you shouldn't be reading such filth anyway.

SIMONE
I grew up in a convent, sir. Everything I know in the world, I owe to books.

The PAWNBROKER reaches high on a shelf for the hidden key. He opens the lock, and lifts the lid; in the box, OPUS SADICUM. He gazes at it lovingly:

PAWNBROKER
Rescued it me-self, from the bonfire.

CUT TO:

INT. SIMONE'S BEDROOM - BEFORE DUSK

SIMONE is seated at her vanity, with a letter-opener and a glue pot. Gently, she loosens the cover off *A Lady's Garden of Verse*, peeling it back from the binding. Next, she slathers it with glue, and starts affixing it to her newly-purchased copy of OPUS SADICUM. She hears a knock at the door, and freezes with fright.

SIMONE
Who is it? Who's there.

A GRUFF VOICE (O.S.)
'S only me, Madame. Volmar.

SIMONE opens the door, revealing the pockmarked COACHMAN.

CONTINUED:

SIMONE
Is the carriage back in the stable?

COACHMAN
Yes'm. And the horses, they all been rested and groomed. No one would suspect any misbehavior.

SIMONE
Good, then.

The COACHMAN doesn't leave. SIMONE's puzzled; what does the hulking figure in the door frame want?

COACHMAN
You promised me a trifle, is all.

SIMONE
(it dawns on her:)
My heavens, yes. Although I shudder to think of their value to *you*.

She goes to her armoire, and pulls out a frilly undergarment. She tosses it to the COACHMAN, who cradles it to his chest.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
If I keep asking favors of you, I shan't have any lingerie left.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - THE SAME NIGHT

Moonlight spills across the walls. The MARQUIS is frantic, and shivering--like a victim of delirium tremens. His fingers scrawl the air desperately, writing in empty space.

He starts rifling through the room looking for something--anything--to use to write. In the heap of straw that now serves as his bed, he makes a thrilling discovery: an ink-well! He grabs it, triumphant. But it's dry. He wets his finger, and scoops the inside of the well: not a drop.

Suddenly, he's seized by an idea. He picks up a shard of glass--the remnant of a mirror--and braces himself. With a grimace, he slashes his finger. He winces, a sound lodged somewhere between pleasure and pain. Next, he holds his finger over the ink well, and squeezes. Blood starts to dribble--one drop at a time--into the tiny bottle.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DOCTOR'S VILLA - THAT EVENING

A tranquil domestic scene. Post-supper, the DOCTOR sits by the fire, sipping a brandy and reading the day's news. Across from him, SIMONE, her head in a book. Its title: *A Lady's Garden of Verse.*

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - MORNING

A wind rustles through the trees, and carries a few leaves in its wake. Fall is descending on the Charenton Asylum.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE collects bedding on her routine run.

MADELEINE
Linens.

This time, she bypasses the MARQUIS' cell. Just as she steps past his door, she hears the peephole slide open.

THE MARQUIS
Psst. Madeleine. My dove...

MADELEINE
(a loud whisper)
But you've got nothing; it's all been seized.

The trap at the base of the MARQUIS' door opens; a shirt, and a pair of breeches tumble out. MADELEINE leans down, and picks them up. She gasps. They're covered in writing.

CUT TO:

INT. MADELEINE'S QUARTERS - THAT NIGHT

MADELEINE's crouched at the table with her MOTHER, the shirt spread out before them by candlelight. MADELEINE picks up a sleeve, and begins to read from it.

MADELEINE
"Monsieur Bouloir was a man whose erotic appetites might discreetly be described as 'post-mortem.' A habitué of cemeteries, his proudest conquest was a maid six decades his senior, deceased a dozen years. The vigor with which he made love caused her bones to dislodge..."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADELEINE'S voice bleeds into the darker tones of another:

FADE TO:

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - MEANWHILE

The MARQUIS, alone in his cell and woozy from the loss of blood, finishes the tale:

THE MARQUIS
"...Still he granted her the highest compliment he accorded any woman..."

He breaks into a fit of giggles.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
"...*well worth the dig!*"

Giddy at his own cleverness, he hugs himself. On all ten fingertips, bandages torn from cloth and soaked with bloodstains.

CUT TO:

INT. MADELEINE'S QUARTERS - LATER THAT NIGHT

MADELEINE sits, the shirt spread before her, a quill in her hand, and a blank piece of parchment awaiting her transcription. She glances at her MOTHER, asleep by the fire. She glances at the blank page. The risk is too great.

CUT TO:

EXT. ASYLUM GATES - A FEW NIGHTS LATER

The HORSEMAN waits, but there's no one to greet him with a manuscript. He rides away.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - DAY

RENEE PELAGIE blusters through the office with gale-like force.

RENEE PELAGIE
Go ahead, I dare you. Throw a handful of dirt into the Marquis' cell. Chances are, he'll knead it into the shape of a book, and hurl it right back out!

She collapses on a near-by divan, fanning herself with vigor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
My chief concern isn't for Charenton, but for you: I know the ridicule you've borne on your husband's behalf.

RENEE PELAGIE
(moving in for the kill:)
Was it your immediate intention to swindle me? Or did the plot dawn on you slowly, over time, like a gathering thundercloud?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I assure you, Madame: every franc you've given me has been put to sterling use.

RENEE PELAGIE
Perhaps I have a suspicious mind, Doctor. But that fortress you're constructing on the southern edge of town...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
(blanching:)
Excuse me?

RENEE PELAGIE
Chinese silk. A balustrade pilfered from a Russian palace--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
What of it?

RENEE PELAGIE
Either the Ministry rewards you with a king's ransom, or *someone has his fingers in my till!*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD stands.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You would enter my office, sally up to my desk, and accuse me of common thievery?

RENEE PELAGIE
I wouldn't call it "common." Shameless, perhaps. Impudent. Bald. But never "common!"

RENEE heads for the door.

RENEE PELAGIE (CONT'D)
I urge you to take concrete action to silence my husband, or expect a visit
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RENEE PELAGIE (cont'd)
from my lawyer, and the Police Prefect as well.

With a slam, she's gone. The DOCTOR clenches and unclenches his fist. He stares out the window at the opulent chateau looming on the horizon. A knock on the door startles him.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Come in.

A bedraggled MADELEINE slips in, after a sleepless night.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
What is it you want?

MADELEINE advances hesitantly toward the DOCTOR's desk.

MADELEINE
'S my mother I'm thinkin' of. If she dies on the street, who's to pay for burial? At least here, we're guaranteed a pit alongside the morons.

She drops a bundle in the center of the DOCTOR's desk: the MARQUIS' clothes, covered in his bloody scrawl.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHAPEL - A SHORT TIME LATER

MADELEINE seeks comfort in the confessional. In the booth, the silhouette of the ABBE.

MADELEINE
Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.

She stops; this is difficult for her.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)
I've betrayed someone dear to me.

NEW ANGLE: INSIDE THE PRIEST'S COMPARTMENT

COULMIER
Perhaps that betrayal was in service of a greater good.

He hears MADELEINE cry; tiny sobs at first, then growing.

MADELEINE
You're a good man, a kindly man. Don't harm him, please. If you do, I should never forgive myself---

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COULMIER
Harm him? How could you think--even for a moment--

MADELEINE bolts from the confessional. COULMIER whispers after her:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Madeleine--

But she's gone. The ABBE swallows, hard.

INT. CORRIDOR - SECONDS LATER

DR. ROYER-COLLARD storms down the hall, like a bull loose from its pen. He passes several cells; their doors are open, their inhabitants gone. He passes VALCOUR.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Where the hell have they gone?

VALCOUR
It's noon-time; they've a meal.

The DOCTOR reaches the MARQUIS' cell; it too is open.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
God-damn you, Valcour!

VALCOUR
What is it, sir? What've I done now?

He charges down the hall; VALCOUR follows, flushed.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The Marquis dines *alone!*

INT. THE DINING HALL - MEANWHILE

Pandemonium. The PATIENTS stomp their feet, and cackle. Striding down the center of the longest table, the MARQUIS. The clothes he is wearing are covered in words. He steps over loaves of bread, and overturned goblets. One PATIENT reads his waistcoat; another paws at his leggings.

THE MARQUIS
My newest book begins at my right cuff, continues across my back, and completes itself at the base of my left shoe--

The doors to the dining hall swing open. DR. ROYER-COLLARD enters; he spies the MARQUIS instantly. All the PATIENTS stare dumbly at the DOCTOR.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There's a pause as the two men assess one another--truly--for the first time. On the DOCTOR's face, an expression of utmost contempt. But on the MARQUIS's face, bemusement. He breaks into a grin, ear-to-ear.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
Don't tell me. You've come to read my trousers.

The DOCTOR fumes.

INT. CORRIDOR - IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

Up and down the hall, GUARDS hurl PATIENTS into their cells, locking the doors behind them.

INT. THE DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

It's empty. A wooden bowl rolls across the floor, still spinning from the chaos before.

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - A SHORT WHILE LATER

COULMIER sits; the DOCTOR towers over him, incensed.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The time has come to adopt more punitive means.

COULMIER
If I truly believed they were *effective*--

This drives the DOCTOR to apoplexy; the veins in his forehead bulge.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
When a child steals from the candy-dish, what do we offer for his reformation? More candy? Talk of God, and an everlasting afterlife? A palette of watercolor paints? Amateur theatricals? NO! *We toss him over our knee, we tear down his breeches, and we thrash him with the rod!*

COULMIER stands, impassioned.

COULMIER
And so he learns to fear punishment, rather than pursue virtue for its own reward.

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You're a sentimental man.

COULMIER
A practical man. Given the Marquis' unusual tastes, a sound thrashing on bare flesh may not qualify as a deterrent.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - MINUTES LATER

COULMIER
What am I to do with you, Marquis? The more I forbid, the more you're provoked!

The MARQUIS, still dressed in his "novel," sits on the floor. He bites a nail, then glances at COULMIER with spaniel eyes.

THE MARQUIS
Headstrong though I may be, I could be convinced to abandon my writing, quite voluntarily.

COULMIER
What in God's name would that require?

THE MARQUIS
A night spent with the partner of my choice.

COULMIER
I will not pimp poor Madeleine!

THE MARQUIS
How quickly the mind leaps; I wasn't talking about Madeleine.

The MARQUIS blows a kiss in COULMIER's direction; COULMIER turns a fiery red.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
OFF WITH YOUR CLOTHES!

THE MARQUIS
Coulmier, you rascal!

COULMIER
OFF, I SAY!

THE MARQUIS
Has my proposal so inflamed you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COULMIER
I DON'T MEAN TO *FLIRT*, MARQUIS!

THE MARQUIS
Oh, but you must! Sex without flirtation is merely rape!

COULMIER
You are beyond villainy! NOW STRIP.

The MARQUIS begins to undress, hurriedly.

THE MARQUIS
My vest?

COULMIER
Off!

He doffs it, and tosses it out the window.

THE MARQUIS
My collar?

COULMIER
Off!

Off and out it goes.

THE MARQUIS
My shoes; they're naught but punctuation.

COULMIER
Off!

The MARQUIS gives two quick high kicks, and his shoes go sailing out the window.

THE MARQUIS
My chintz, my lace, my gabardine?

COULMIER
Every stitch.

The MARQUIS swings his trousers in a circle, overhead.

THE MARQUIS
WON'T YOU JOIN ME, PONY-BOY?

They go sailing out, too.

EXT. THE COURTYARD BELOW - CONTINUOUS

A few LUNATICS have gathered below; they grab for the MARQUIS' clothes as they tumble from the window above.

PITOU
(reading from a vest:)
"Sister Mary Quesnet had the most dextrous vulva in all France..."

FRANVAL and CLEANTE shriek and clap with glee.

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER
Now you'll live as our Father intended--less like a man, and more like the beast you are! Naked in a hollow pit!

THE MARQUIS
As lived the noble savages of Lescaux, where even today their paintings remain undimmed by time!

In the dim shadows of his cell, the MARQUIS is practically naked now, except for his hair.

COULMIER
YOUR WIG! REMOVE YOUR WIG!

Reluctantly, the MARQUIS slides off his wig, and uses it to conceal his privates.

THE MARQUIS
How prudent you are, Abbe. I'd planned to curl my locks in the shape of letters, and write a Paean to Buggery that would trail down my backside and bob at my ass.

COULMIER holds out his hand. The MARQUIS takes a step backwards into darkness, and tosses the wig to him.

COULMIER
You'll no longer spread your insidious gospel, where tyranny is the norm and goodness the last refuge of the weak. Where indifferent nature rails untempered by the presence of a God. Where art's magnitude is the breadth of its depravity! NO!

THE MARQUIS
No?

CONTINUED:

COULMIER
FROM NOW ON, YOU WILL NOT EVEN WRITE YOUR OWN IGNOMINIOUS NAME!

COULMIER makes a move for the door; the MARQUIS surges forward and blocks his way. His tone is deadly now.

THE MARQUIS
Are your convictions so fragile that mine cannot stand in opposition to them? Is your God so flimsy? So weak? For shame.

Their eyes lock; so much anger seethes between them, it's electric.

COULMIER
Don't flatter yourself, Marquis. You're not the Anti-Christ. You're nothing but a malcontent who knows how to spell.

With that, COULMIER skirts under the MARQUIS' arm and exits, locking the door behind him.

THE MARQUIS
Psst...

Against his better judgement, COULMIER yanks open the peephole.

COULMIER
What now?

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS lunges against the door, and thrusts his face against the trap. He hisses:

THE MARQUIS
My truest quill lies between my thighs. When it fills with ink and rises to the fore...*oh, the wondrous books it will write!*

COULMIER slams the peephole shut, and the MARQUIS' face disappears. From behind his prison door, the MARQUIS bursts into laughter.

Furious, COULMIER stomps away. His footsteps echo against the stone wall like thunderclaps.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BUILDING SITE OF THE DOCTOR'S CHATEAU - DAY

Construction has progressed significantly. The DOCTOR and SIMONE stroll through a sun-lit atrium.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Simone. Darling.

He reaches to take her by the elbow, almost tenderly. When she evades him, he turns autocratic.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
You must decide. Will it be Christofle, or Baccarat?

SIMONE glances back at MONSIEUR PROUIX, who trails them at a discreet distance. They exchange a lingering look.

INT. THE BALL ROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

MONSIEUR PROUIX holds a variety of swatches against the wall for SIMONE's approval.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
I favor a Florentine tapestry, Madame. But if you've a preference for stripes---

SIMONE glances out the window; the DOCTOR is occupied, consulting with the FOREMAN. She turns to MONSIEUR PROUIX and smiles:

SIMONE
Are you a literary man?

MONSIEUR PROUIX
Excuse me?

From the folds of her skirt, SIMONE pulls a book.

SIMONE
I so admire men with an appetite for... *books.*

Intrigued, MONSIEUR PROUIX takes the parcel. He opens the book and peruses a few lines. His face turns bright red.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
Madame, how could you...is it possible...have you actually *read* this volume?

CONTINUED:

SIMONE
I've memorized it. Would you like me to recite?

She giggles. MONSIEUR PROUIX joins in, knowingly.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
There comes a time in a young lady's life when she has to cast book's aside, and learn from experience.

SIMONE cocks her head at a coy angle:

SIMONE
(a challenge:)
That, Monsieur, requires a teacher.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

MADAME LECLERC nurses a cup of tea; MADELEINE folds laundry; COULMIER is paying them a visit:

COULMIER
You'll have your own cottage on the grounds, and ten francs a month to use as you please.

MADELEINE
It's because of the Marquis, isn't it?

COULMIER
In part, yes.

MADELEINE
He may be the Devil to you, but he's just someone's crazy old uncle to me.

COULMIER
He's occasion for trouble, either way.

MADELEINE
Suppose I promised never to visit him again.

COULMIER
Is that a promise you could truly keep?

MADELEINE knows the answer; she pouts silently. Finally:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
You'll be happier in town, I assure you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADELEINE
But who'll hear my confession?

COULMIER
Madame Bougival has a priest of her own.

MADELEINE
Will he show me the same mercies you have? The same tenderness?

MADAME LECLERC
Hush, child, that's quite enough of your pestering now.
(to Coulmier:)
You're more than a priest; you're an angel!
(back to Madeleine; sternly:)
Ain't he, Maddy?

MADELEINE smiles wanly; she doesn't want to leave.

MADELEINE
Yes, of course. I expect he is.

CUT TO:

INT. MADELEINE'S QUARTERS - THAT NIGHT

MADELEINE tosses and turns, agitated; perspiration plasters her hair to her face. Finally, she crawls out of bed. She steals a taper from her bedside, and slips out of the room.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE glides up stairwells and down hallways in her nightgown. She reaches the ABBE's quarters, and raps on his door.

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER, awakened by the knocking, draws on his robe.

COULMIER
Who is it? Who's there?

COULMIER cracks the door. MADELEINE slithers inside.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
You shouldn't be calling at this hour.

COULMIER sticks his head out the door, glancing to and fro, then closes it tightly. He can't fully disguise his pleasure at seeing MADELEINE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Suppose the nightwatchman saw you, or the cook. We'd cause a scandal, you and I, worthy of your friend the Marquis--

MADELEINE
(cutting him off:)
Don't turn us out, Father.

COULMIER
"Turn you out?" I want to better your station--

MADELEINE
I know, and it's a sin against God for me to refuse your kindness. But my heart's held fast here...

MADELEINE's so full of feeling that she starts to cry.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)
I shouldn't have come...God forgive me, I shouldn't have come...

COULMIER reaches for her, and takes her in his arms.

COULMIER
This will be a desolate place without you.

He feels her body--wrapped only in thin muslin--against his own. His resistance spent, they kiss. Suddenly, he pulls back.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Go back to your room.

MADELEINE
What?

COULMIER
Quickly.

MADELEINE
When we pass in the corridor, you'll look the other way--

COULMIER
And don't come back, not tonight, not again--

MADELEINE
You'll hate me now, won't you?

CONTINUED: (2)

COULMIER swings open the door. He summons all his willpower:

COULMIER
I could never hate you, Madeleine. My vows are mine and mine alone; so are my failings. Forgive me.

Cowed, MADELEINE stifles a sob, and slips out. COULMIER closes the door behind her.

Alone now, COULMIER tries to walk off his arousal. He circles the room like a prisoner in a cage. Impulsively, he goes to the door, and opens it again.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
(a whisper:)
Madeleine--

INT. THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE COULMIER'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

It's too late. She's gone. Only VALCOUR, making his evening rounds. He and COULMIER lock eyes for an instant, and COULMIER quickly ducks back inside, his heart pounding.

CUT TO:

INT. ANOTHER CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE, stung by COULMIER's rejection, walks anxiously down the gloomy, forbidding hall. She sings a little song to herself to ward off fear:

MADELEINE
"Three pretty maids, playing in the dell; the first fell in the river; the second down the well; the third was not a maid at all, so now she burns in hell--"

She stops. Somewhere deep within, MADELEINE makes a sudden, irrevocable decision. She abruptly turns around, switching direction, heading toward the MARQUIS.

CUT TO:

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS - MEANWHILE

COULMIER kneels, rosary in hand, fervently in mid-prayer:

COULMIER
"...and deliver us from temptation..."

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EXT. COURTYARD PASSAGE - MEANWHILE

MADELEINE passes into the courtyard and through an iron gate, toward the Patients' Ward.

INT. THE PATIENT'S WARD - CONTINUOUS

Sounds fill the night air. Behind one cell door, a LUNATIC wails. Behind another, the gibberish. Behind a third, the dull pounding of a head against stone.

Peepholes in doorways slide open, and EYES observe MADELEINE as she passes. She tiptoes past BOUCHON's cell, but it's too late: he's spied her.

He sticks his face against the peephole. On his cheek, a hideous scar which bears the print of the hot iron. He wiggles his index finger:

BOUCHON
I ain't washed it; not while it's still got your scent...

He giggles, sniffs his finger, then licks it hungrily. MADELEINE turns pale, and quickens her pace.

INT. OUTSIDE THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE scrambles for her skeleton key.

INT. THE MARQUIS' CELL - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE slips inside. For a moment, she can't see a thing. She holds up her candle and--in the shadows, crumpled in the corner--the MARQUIS.

THE MARQUIS
Madeleine!

She realizes he's sans clothes. She gasps and turns away.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
Surely you've seen a man naked.

MADELEINE
It's only been described to me. In your books.

THE MARQUIS
This is how your employer chooses to keep me; like a Roman sculpture, undraped!

CONTINUED:

She rallies and turns to look at him, seated in the gloom. She squints.

MADELEINE
I must say, in your novels you stoke the most unrealistic expectations.

THE MARQUIS
You're far crueler than I, my sweet.

MADELELINE tosses her shawl to him, which he fastens like a skirt around his waist.

MADELEINE
I had to see you...if only for a final time...

THE MARQUIS
What's this?

MADELEINE
The Abbe is sending me away, just two days hence...

THE MARQUIS
No!

MADELEINE
It's true. To work for a lady in town. He fears for me here, what with the likes of you--

THE MARQUIS
Don't be fooled, Madeleine! He fears for *himself*. He's like a man starving, and you--ha!--you're like a pork chop dolloped with heavy cream--

MADELEINE
But he's a priest--

THE MARQUIS
First and foremost, he's a MAN. And you remind him of that fact, all the time. And he resents you for it.

MADELEINE's brow darkens; she knows what the MARQUIS says is true. She crosses to the window, to avoid his gaze. Once there--with her eyes downcast and her hands folded contritely-she makes a difficult confession.

CONTINUED: (2)

MADELEINE
You must know it was I who betrayed you to Dr. Royer-Collard. I told him about the bedsheets, and I even gave him your shirt, besides--

THE MARQUIS
And I love you the more for it.

MADELEINE
(incredulous)
How can that be?

THE MARQUIS
Don't you see that by informing against me you affirm my principles? You were willing to sacrifice me on the block to achieve your own gain!

MADELEINE
Hence, my sorrow.

THE MARQUIS
In the Animal Kingdon, does the tiger spare his sister the doe? Not when he's hungry! That, Madeleine, is Natural Order! A carefully orchestrated cycle of consumption, which mankind all too often violates with his false codes of law and morality. But you! You rose above such petty constructs, and fed yourself upon my very carcass.

MADELEINE furrows her brow in confusion.

MADELEINE
And so I am endeared to you?

THE MARQUIS
I stand before you not in rage, but awe.

The MARQUIS bows, low. MADELEINE gives a little laugh, borne of relief and amusement.

MADELEINE
You're a queer one, all right.

THE MARQUIS
Have you a stick of graphite? Even so much as a lowly piece of chalk?

MADELEINE
I tell you, I'm forbidden!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The MARQUIS nods, mumbles to himself, and taps his cranium with the tips of his fingers. An idea.

THE MARQUIS
Never fear, my angel. I have a plan.

MADELEINE
Let me be its agent, I beg you! As penance for my wrongs against you!

THE MARQUIS
Together, we'll compose a tale more horrible than all the rest combined. A final volley from us both, yes?

At this, MADELEINE's eyes light up.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
I'll whisper a new tale to my neighbor, the lunatic Cleante. He'll in turn whisper it to his neighbor, Dauphin, who'll whisper it to his neighbor Franval, who'll whisper it to Bouchon--

MADELEINE
Whose cell lies next to the linen cabinet!

THE MARQUIS
Precisely!

MADELEINE
There, armed with a quill of my own, I'll commit it to paper!

THE MARQUIS
Voila!

MADELEINE giggles, drying her tears with the back of her hand.

MADELEINE
But with men whose minds are so weak, will your art survive the journey?

THE MARQUIS
My heinous vision, filtered through the minds of the insane? Who knows? They might improve it!

The MARQUIS kisses her fingers, one-by-one.

CONTINUED: (4)

THE MARQUIS
Practice your handwriting, my lovely. So you'll do my words justice.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - THE NEXT DAY

A crack of thunder, then lightning. Rain begins to pelt the stone walls of Charenton.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE, basket in hand, makes her final rounds. She sees COULMIER and starts to change course, but it's too late.

COULMIER
Madeleine--

MADELEINE
I'm not stupid, you know. You don't fear the Marquis' sway on me. You fear your own.

COULMIER reaches to take her by the arm:

COULMIER
What's all this?

She wrests herself away.

MADELEINE
(nasty, but tinged with hurt:)
Don't come any closer, Father. *God's watching.*

With that, she storms down the hall. COULMIER starts to follow, but in response she hurries her step.

INT. MADELEINE'S QUARTERS - DUSK

MADELEINE ladles some into a bowl for her MOTHER.

MADAME LECLERC
The Marquis' putting you up to mischief on your last night here, ain't he?

MADELEINE
I can take care of myself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADAME LECLERC
Be careful, child. If I didn't know ya better, I'd say you were the Devil's handmaiden.

MADELEINE rolls her eyes, and slurps her own soup.

MADAME LECLERC (CONT'D)
You'll read it to me, won't you? Afore ya run off with it?

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: THE GENTLE SCRAPE OF A QUILL AGAINST PAPER

MONSIEUR PROUIX (V.O.)
"Most Esteemed Dr. Royer-Collard. At long last, your Chateau is complete."

INT. A BOARDING ROOM IN A ROADSIDE TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

MONSIEUR PROUIX sits in an open dressing gown at a small cherry-wood secretary, writing a note.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
"You'll find everything in its assigned place: the chintz draperies, the English bell pulls, even the ivory door stops. Only one detail is missing..."

He emits a series of staccato moans followed by a long sigh.

ANGLE: UNDER THE DESK

SIMONE rises from between the ARCHITECT's legs. She's tumbling out of her corset, and her face is aglow. She smacks her lips, then wipes them with the back of her hand.

MONSIEUR PROUIX (CONT'D)
"...your wife."

SIMONE
Tell him I'm no fool. A prison's still a prison, even with wainscoting and Baccarat chandeliers.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
"And so I have pirated Simone away to a safe haven."

SIMONE
Tell him if he uncovers our whereabouts--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MONSIEUR PROUIX
Yes?

SIMONE
--you'll slit your wrists with a razor, and I'll plunge a hat-pin through my heart.

MONSIEUR PROUIX pauses, genuinely touched.

MONSIEUR PROUIX
You'd do that, rather than forsake our love?

SIMONE scowls.

SIMONE
No. But tell him I would.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DOCTOR'S NEWLY-FINISHED CHATEAU - LATER

The DOCTOR walks up the impressive steps to the front door. Stuck there--with a quill pen--a letter. He plucks it, and begins to read. His iron jaw begins to quake.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

He rushes through the grand foyer, up the magnificent staircase.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

He slams open the double doors of the parlor; it's empty. He continues charging, like a bull elephant, into the next room.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Each wall in the room is lined in mirrors. DR. ROYER-COLLARD swirls around in every direction, only to confront his own reflection at every turn.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - NIGHT

MADELEINE swings open the door, and sets down her laundry basket. Next, she lights a small wall sconce, filling the room with an orange glow. She closes the door behind her, locking it with the skeleton key. She slips the key into her apron pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Behind a row of shelves, the discernible shape of an old wooden door with wrought-iron hinges. Clearly, it was once a portal, but it was plastered shut long ago. In its knotty, rotting wood, a tiny hole. An EYEBALL watches MADELEINE's every move.

THE PEEPING TOM'S POV: MADELEINE lifts a sheet off the top of the basket. Under it, a stack of parchment, an inkwell, a candle, and a quill. She removes each item, one-by-one.

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

BOUCHON's stands pressed against the old wooden door. A belt hoists his sack-cloth trousers high above his waist

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS dislodges a small stone from the wall, and peers into the neighboring cell.

THE MARQUIS
Psst..Cleante! Are you there? ARE YOU THERE?

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

CLEANTE is a study in nervous tics; his eyes blink, his ears wiggle, and his mouth quivers.

CLEANTE
Marquis? Is that you?

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

THE MARQUIS
Who else would it be? Listen to what I say, and report it post-haste to your neighbor Dauphin.

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

CLEANTE
But I'm no longer a man! *This morning, I awoke a bird!* I've huge, flapping wings, and a beak for scavenging! And I can warble, too!

CLEANTE begins to trill.

THE MARQUIS (O.S.)
CLEANTE!

CONTINUED:

CLEANTE
Eh?

THE MARQUIS (O.S.)
This morning, I awoke a cat. If you don't do what I tell you, I'll sink my little fangs into your drumsticks, and suck the marrow straight out of your bones.

CLEANTE starts to tremble convulsively.

CLEANTE
At your service, Count.

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS sighs with relief; he's won. He begins his tale:

THE MARQUIS
Our story concerns the prostitute Fanchon. One fine day, Fanchon was visited by a surgeon...

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

CLEANTE has left his post by the door, and stands on a chair in the middle of the room. He whispers through a grate in the ceiling:

CLEANTE
...Fanchon was visited by a surgeon. He bade her strip,and strip she did....

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

DAUPHIN, crouched on the floor, listens through the grate:

CLEANTE (O.S.)
...As she stood naked before him, he ran his fingers across her skin, pulling apart folds and flesh, inspecting follicles....

DAUPHIN starts to snicker, rocking back and forth on his heels and slapping his forehead in rhythm.

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

FRANVAL stands on his bed, peering through a barred transom; DAUPHIN is on the other side.

CONTINUED:

DAUPHIN
"What shall I ready?" asked Fanchon. "My mouth, my ass or my succulent oyster?"

FRANVAL leaps from his bed, and runs across the room. He takes a small portrait of CHRIST off the wall, revealing a chink in the stone. Through it, BOUCHON's cell.

FRANVAL
"What shall I ready?" asked Fanchon. "My mouth, my ass, or my succulent oyster?"

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

BOUCHON whispers through the wooden door to MADELEINE:

BOUCHON
"...my mouth, my ass, or my succulent oyster...."

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE scripts the word "succulent oyster."

INT. THE MARQUIS QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

THE MARQUIS
"None!" cried the surgeon, brandishing his scalpel. "With my blade, I'll carve new orifices where there were none before!"

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

CLEANTE
(into the grate)
"...new orifices where there were none before!"

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

DAUPHIN
(over the transom)
"...with my blade I'll carve new orifices...!

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

FRANVAL
(through the chink)
"...orifices where there were none..."

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

BOUCHON
(through the hole in the door)
"...none before!"

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE mouths the words as she scribes "none before...."

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

His face pours sweat; he's in a state of orgasmic excitement:

THE MARQUIS
"Once hewn," cried the surgeon, "I can thrust myself into gashes unsullied by your previous suitors!"

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

CLEANTE
(into the grate)
...thrust myself...

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

DAUPHIN
(over the transom)
...gashes unsullied by previous suitors...

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

FRANVAL
...carve and THRUST...carve and THRUST...carve and THRUST....

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

BOUCHON whips off his belt, and his trousers crumple to the floor. He hooks the buckle over the head of a nail in the hinge. Next, he twists the belt around his hand for leverage, and begins to pull.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE
(a frightened whisper)
Please. The words. Tell me the words.

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

The nail comes loose, and falls onto the floor. BOUCHON steps back, amazed.

MADELEINE (O.S.)
I can't hear the words.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

Now terrified, MADELEINE reaches in her apron pocket; she sticks her finger straight through a hole. The key is nowhere to be found. She tries the door; it's locked fast. Desperate--on all fours--she begins to search the floor.

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

THE MARQUIS
With that, Fanchon expelled a scream so extravagantly pitched, that the surgeon was obliged to tear out her tongue, sealing the wound with a poker from the fire--

He hears a low rumble, building slowly to a roar. The story is travelling through every nook and cranny in the place, like some mysterious breeze. He breaks into a delighted grin.

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

DAUPHIN rhythmically recites just three words, like a mantra:

DAUPHIN
From the fire...from the fire...the fire, the fire, the fire!

He plucks a candle from a wall sconce, and hurls it onto his bed. The mattress bursts into flame.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Roused from his complacency, a GUARD races down the hallway toward DAUPHIN's cell. He tears open the door, and smoke pours forth. He coughs, then doubles over. DAUPHIN steps out of the haze, a murderous look in his eye. He overtakes the GUARD.

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

He wrests another nail from the hinge.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

DAUPHIN runs up and down the hall, the GUARDS' keychain in hand, unlocking cell after cell. The LUNATICS pour out.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE pounds on the door, and cries for help:

MADELEINE
Please! Abbe! ABBE!

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

BOUCHON starts prying the door out of the wall.

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER springs awake, pulling on his vestments with trembling hands.

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - CONTINUOUS

A window pane blows out. Blazing linen flies down from a turret. Furniture is hurled out a fifth story window. The GUARDS stationed at the gate run toward the entrance.

INT. THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS, now quaking with laughter, claps his hands.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE watches, helpless, as BOUCHON dismantles the door. She can see him now, through the shelving.

INT. THE CATACOMBS OF THE ASYLUM - CONTINUOUS

Bedlam reigns. A few GARRULOUS INMATES ride on the shoulders of dazed GUARDS. Other GUARDS are beating MADMEN back into their cells with clubs.

FRANVAL, now free, grabs a CHAMBERMAID by the breasts, and drags her into a darkened corner. She screams.

EXT. A PARAPET - CONTINUOUS

A LUNATIC hurls his chamber pot out the window; it sails through the sky, and smashes through the art studio skylight.

INT. THE ART STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

CONTINUED:

Huge shards of glass rain down, toppling easels; the chamber pot hits the floor, and breaks into a thousand pieces.

INT. THE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A mortified COOK locks himself in the larder. INMATES plunder the cupboards, shoving bread and fruit into their gaping maws.

INT. THE COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

WARDS stream into the open air, tearing off their clothing, and dancing in the rain.

INT. THE CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER bursts into the chapel to find ONE MADMAN mounting ST. AGATHA. The statue tears from the wall, and begins to crash down.

INT. THE LINEN CABINET

BOUCHON is cavalierly kicking the shelves out of his way. MADELEINE, white with fear, finally finds the missing key. She tries sticking it in the lock, but her hands are shaking too violently. BOUCHON advances.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE LINEN PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

From within, a heart-piercing scream. From beneath the door, a puddle of blood, widening, like a crimson tide.

INT. THE MARQUIS' CELL - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS recognizes the howling voice down the hall. His face goes white, and--with dread--he whispers:

THE MARQUIS
Madeleine...

He lurches toward his cell door, and cries:

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
MADELEINE! MADELEINE!

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS' voice can barely be heard above the din.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MORNING SKY

The sun turns the horizon a feverish red.

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

DAUPHIN is nowhere to be seen; his cot is smoldering ash.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The CHAMBERMAID who was attacked earlier now sweeps broken glass in the otherwise silent hall.

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

FRANVAL lies in bed, tightly bound in four-point restraints. His face is a covered in bruises.

INT. THE CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

The groundskeeper ORVOLLE restores ST. AGATHA to her pedestal.

INT. A PIT - CONTINUOUS

Deep in the bowels of the building, a large pit has been dug. It has a spiral stair built along its parameter.

In its center, a LUNATIC, crouched in a feral pose. He wears a heavy iron collar with four long chains, each strapped to a different wall in the room. He no longer resembles a man; he looks like a beast, trapped in a stone cage. Our eyes adjust to the dark; it's the MARQUIS.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER strides across the marble floor, VALCOUR at his side.

VALCOUR
The fire in the belfry has been doused. We quieted the horses in the stables. And the patients have all been locked in their cells.

They stop. COULMIER looks gravely at VALCOUR:

COULMIER
All of them?

VALCOUR
Save one.

CONTINUED:

CUT TO:

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY- A SHORT WHILE LATER

COULMIER unlocks the door, and they enter. The shelves are topsy-turvy; some are split clean in two. The linens are drenched in blood.

COULMIER glances down at his feet; he sees a few pieces of parchment. He leans down and picks up a sheet. The last word stops in mid-sentence, and the ink trails off the page. Rather than let his cries be heard, COULMIER shoves the paper into his mouth to stifle the sound.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MADAME LECLERC lights the kindling beneath the laundry vats. She moves with the intuitive knowledge of someone who's memorized the placement of each item in the room. She takes a kettle of lye, and pours the steaming liquid into the first vat. Next, she over-turns two baskets of laundry into the mixture, takes her wooden pole, and starts to stir.

The pole hits something and sticks. MADAME LECLERC gives it a good wrest, but it won't move. She jabs at it again, more fiercely.

ANGLE ON: THE VAT

Rising to the surface like a phantom from the mist, MADELEINE. Her skin is translucent blue. For an instant--as her corpse rolls in the water--we see that it is riddled with knife wounds.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

With a trembling hand, MADAME LECLERC reaches toward the object in the water. Her fingers alight on MADELEINE's face. She tries to scream, but it's only a hollow rasp.

ANGLE: UNDER THE STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Hidden in the shadows, BOUCHON. He is dripping wet; he looks strangely clean. He cries quietly, like a child who has lost a favorite toy.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - MEANWHILE

The DOCTOR's carriage screeches to a halt. He dismounts. When he stares up at the building; his face goes slack with horror. Ashen sheets hanging from the windows. Smoke rising from heaps of rubble.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Good God.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

MADELEINE's grey body lies on a stretcher; VALCOUR draws--fittingly enough--a bedsheet over it. BOUCHON, manacled and contrite, is lead away by two GUARDS.

COULMIER sits at MADAME LECLERC's side. She clutches a small rag doll and rocks softly.

MADAME LECLERC
Now I've lost my other set of eyes. This asylum of yours, its blinded me twice.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - LATER

The DOCTOR cracks his knuckles, with barely-controlled fury. COULMIER sits, his head bowed.

COULMIER
The Marquis treated the patients to...an oral recitation. They were... overstimulated...by its contents.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
"Over-stimulated," Abbe?

COULMIER
Bouchon burst through the confines of his cell, and...
(with difficulty:)
...tortured Madeleine until she died.

The DOCTOR tosses MADELEINE's bloody manuscript onto his desk.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
We mustn't blame Bouchon. Oh no. If he'd possessed restraint, conscience,
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (cont'd)
morality, he'd have had no need of us. *Would he?*

COULMIER raises his head. His eyes are red from crying, but his jaw is clenched. He's resolved not to lose his temper before the DOCTOR.

COULMIER
No.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
It is our duty, is it not, to protect malleable minds from pernicious influence?

COULMIER
It is.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And when we falter at this charge?

COULMIER
Bedlam. And death.

The DOCTOR lays into COULMIER, savagely:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I was entrusted to forge order from chaos. And what has transpired since my arrival here? MURDER and MAYHEM. Events which do little to enhance my curriculum vitae.

COULMIER's so angry that the muscles in his face twitch.

COULMIER
I've counselled many a patient in the years before you came here, *sir*, when Charenton was only a distant entry on your roster of ambitions.

COULMIER rises to face the DOCTOR. The words pour out of him, in an avalanche.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
I've treated men so bereft of reason that they slaughtered their own children, or made mincemeat of their wives. And *I redeemed them*. I gave them grace again in the eyes of God. But they each possessed a quality essential to recovery- *a fervent desire for their own betterment*. Without that, I've nothing to seize, no rudder to steer the course. The
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

COULMIER (cont'd)
Marquis sits, content, like an infant in its own feces, giggling at each new outrage, gleefully celebrating his own debasement. He wears his inhumanity like a victory banner! WELL, WHAT IN GOD'S NAME AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THAT?

The DOCTOR stands from behind his desk.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
You may pack your bags. I've arranged for your re-assignment to a monastery in Avignon.

COULMIER
(stunned)
What's this?

With brusque efficiency, the DOCTOR thrusts a stack of papers into his satchel.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
I'm resigning myself, effective immediately.

COULMIER
You, too?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I prefer to exit with grace, rather than have my job wrested from me in what would undoubtedly prove to be a rather conclusive study in the art of humiliation.

COULMIER
Why so suddenly? Why now?

The DOCTOR snarls, unleashing pent-up anger.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Oh, I knew his writing was base and vile. But I had no idea of its *corruptive powers*, Abbe.

The DOCTOR whirls to face COULMIER, fighting back tears of rage:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
It's no less than viral. Turning purity into decadence. Fidelity into scandal.

CONTINUED: (3)

He grabs the model from his desk, and hurls it into his Roccocco stove. The wallpaper browns and curls; the wood starts to spark. The tiny house implodes.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
We'll close Charenton, before the Ministry gets the satisfaction.

The DOCTOR pulls on his coat, and takes his hat off its peg.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER rushes after DR. ROYER-COLLARD.

COULMIER
What about the patients?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
(a bitter diatribe:)
We'll turn them loose upon the streets. They've learned the Marquis' maxims. Now let them live by his commandments. Let them kill for their trousers. Let them rip bread and meat from the hands of children.

COULMIER
But don't you see? To admit defeat is to endorse his nihilism!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
THEN SO BE IT!

The DOCTOR barrels out the door.

EXT. THE FRONT STEPS OF CHARENTON - CONTINUOUS

The DOCTOR heads for his waiting carriage. COULMIER calls from the steps:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
I can not and will not accept these terms! He has yet to conquer me, Doctor!

COULMIER bounds the steps, and all but hangs on the DOCTOR's carriage door. He gazes searchingly in the DOCTOR's face.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
I implore you, sir. Give me one more chance. Otherwise, I'll never again have the courage to face the glass.

An excruciating pause.

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Very well. Since you insist...a final round.

COULMIER
(bursting with gratitude:)
God bless you, Doctor. My reputation's at your feet.

The horses whinny and snort, and the DOCTOR's carriage lurches away. COULMIER watches it disappear.

INT. THE DOCTOR'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

DR. ROYER-COLLARD glances through the rear window of his carriage to see COULMIER, a dwindling speck against the asylum's mighty silhouette. He smiles a sardonic smile.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Run, Abbe, run. Before the fire I've lit beneath you scorches your vestments, and causes your raiments to smoke.

INT. A DARKENED CELL - THAT AFTERNOON

The door swings open, and light illuminates BOUCHON. As soon as he sees VALCOUR in the doorway, he scuttles under his cot.

VALCOUR
Now, now. Don't be shy. We've a nice surprise just waiting for you...

BOUCHON peers out from beneath the bed.

VALCOUR (CONT'D)
That's a good boy.

EXT. THE COURTYARD - MINUTES LATER

Sweat trickles in tiny rivulets down BOUCHON's forehead. His head is locked in a wooden vise; glistening above him, the silver blade of the guillotine. It falls with a loud "whoosh."

INT. THE CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER blazes down the hall toward the pit, carrying a large wooden staff.

INT. THE PIT - CONTINUOUS

As soon as COULMIER swings open the door, THE MARQUIS blurts defensively:

CONTINUED:

THE MARQUIS
Am I to be held responsible for the actions of every half-wit here?

COULMIER
The man who loads the cannon and the man who fires it are both to blame.

THE MARQUIS
Suppose one of your precious wards had attempted to walk on water and drowned? Would you condemn the Bible? *I think not!*

COULMIER
If only Bouchon had killed himself, and not another.

THE MARQUIS
So I am to tailor my writing for imbeciles?

COULMIER
YOU WEREN'T TO BE WRITING AT ALL!

THE MARQUIS
A writer cannot answer for his audience!

COULMIER
He must, when he incites it to crime!

The MARQUIS cries out in frustration, and rattles his chains.

THE MARQUIS
The experience of art, MY LITTLE BULL'S PIZZLE, is a collaborative affair!

He rails at COULMIER like a violently impassioned professor with a slow-witted student.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
The writer supplies stimuli, the reader his response. All I can control is the art itself; my subject, culled from life, and told with an eye toward truth, or--at least--truth as life has taught me to perceive it. And you must concede that life has taught me some very scabrous tidbits indeed! And so I record them! Dutifully! As any artist should! But the *response* to my work! Well, that's a fickle thing indeed. It may be prompted by a reader's race, his sex, his
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THE MARQUIS (cont'd)
politics. The potency of the beer he drank with dinner. The angle of his bed. Even the last time he diddled his wife. In short, variables well beyond the scope of the artist. What am I to do? POLICE MY READERS AS YOU POLICE ME?

THE MARQUIS sinks back, exhausted. But COULMIER's far from won over.

COULMIER
You wish to know the sum impact of your work upon the public?

THE MARQUIS
Pray, tell?

COULMIER
INNOCENT PEOPLE DIE.

The MARQUIS turns icy.

THE MARQUIS
So many authors are denied the gratification of a concrete response to their toiling. I am blessed, am I not?

This insult, this flagrant disregard for MADELEINE, cuts through COULMIER. Something in him snaps. With a joust, he flattens THE MARQUIS against the walls of the pit, holding the prod threateningly against his chin.

COULMIER
It's no secret that you loved her.

THE MARQUIS
I'm not the one who *ogled* her in the hall--

COULMIER
You bartered pages for a single kiss.

THE MARQUIS
--her breasts, heaving under poplin--

COULMIER
You wrote tales on her behalf--

THE MARQUIS
--her ass, bobbling, like two melons at the bottom of a sack--

CONTINUED: (3)

COULMIER
This callousness of yours; it's nothing but a pose--

THE MARQUIS
I WANTED TO FUCK HER, THAT'S ALL!

COULMIER
AND DID YOU?

THE MARQUIS
IT'S NOT YOUR PROVINCE TO ASK.

COULMIER
You're no stranger to rape, Marquis. And yet with her, you cooed. You courted. You *begged.*

THE MARQUIS
Go to hell!

COULMIER
Why was it you never took her by force?

THE MARQUIS
Who is to say I did not?

COULMIER
Was it impotence?

THE MARQUIS
NEVER!

COULMIER
Was it polite deference? Was it humane regard? Was it *love?*

The MARQUIS chokes on COULMIER's last word. He grabs the staff from him, snapping it in two.

THE MARQUIS
I FUCKED HER A THOUSAND TIMES! WITH PNEUMATIC FORCE!

COULMIER
(triumphant)
We inspected the body, Marquis. She died *intact.*

A stunned pause. The MARQUIS cracks--a tiny cry at first, which erupts into genuine sobbing. He sinks to his knees, and claws the dirt with his hands. Finally, he speaks. His voice is barely a whisper:

CONTINUED: (4)

THE MARQUIS
Give her a proper burial. In the churchyard, at my expense. Do not inter her sweet body in the same ground as the devils who inhabit this accursed place.

COULMIER walks over to the MARQUIS, and kneels. He puts his hand on the MARQUIS's shoulder.

COULMIER
(softly, with compassion:)
Your terrible secret, revealed. You're a man, after all.

The MARQUIS looks at COULMIER for a moment. Suddenly--savagely--he spits in his face. COULMIER wipes away the indignity. He stands, severe now.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
All that remains now is your punishment.

THE MARQUIS
Your lily mind can't compete with mine in that department. What'll it be? Fifty lashes? A night on the rack?

COULMIER
Blood has been spilled, and I must spill more to stem its tide.

THE MARQUIS
The logic of a true warrior. Congratulations.

THE MARQUIS extends his arm:

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
I dare you. Stab my flesh. Which one of us will bleed?

COULMIER stares into the MARQUIS' eyes; he sees himself reflected in their center.

COULMIER
Tomorrow, you'll pay a visit to the surgeon.

COULMIER turns, and heads briskly up the stairs. From the top, he looks down at THE MARQUIS, a dirty savage at the bottom of his hole.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
He'll cut out your tongue.

CONTINUED: (5)

For once, THE MARQUIS' balks. COULMIER almost smiles at his own victory.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: THE MARQUIS' LEFT HAND

VALCOUR manacles it to an operating table.

CLOSE UP: THE MARQUIS' RIGHT HAND

VALCOUR cuffs it, too.

INT. THE OPERATING THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Next, VALCOUR splays the MARQUIS' feet, and clamps them in irons. Finally, he buckles leather restraints around the MARQUIS' torso.

The MARQUIS cranes his head, and glances at the table beside him. On it, primitive medical instruments, laid out ominously in a row. A SURGEON sharpens his blade on a stone. COULMIER watches.

SURGEON
I've opium to numb the pain.

COULMIER
(crisply:)
Our intention here is punitive. If we numb the pain, what's the point?

The MARQUIS twists his neck to find the PRIEST:

THE MARQUIS
Surely you'll grant me a final word.

COULMIER
(terse)
Of course.

THE MARQUIS
I didn't forge the mind of man. Your precious God did that; cramming it full or rancor and bloodlust. Like Zeus, thrusting all those tiny demons into Pandora's Box.

His voice cracks.

THE MARQUIS (CONT'D)
Don't hate me, just because I turn the key and let them loose.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COULMIER
(softening:)
I don't hate you, Marquis. More's the pity.

The MARQUIS wiggles his fingers; COULMIER clasps his hand to wish him strength. A final, frightened plea:

THE MARQUIS
Abbe de Coulmier!

COULMIER
I'm here.

The MARQUIS' eyes flash with malevolence.

THE MARQUIS
Would that I were so easily silenced.

Immediately, COULMIER wrenches his hand free. The SURGEON raises his scalpel, and looks to COULMIER for permission to begin.

COULMIER nods.

CUT TO:

INT. OUTSIDE THE OPERATING THEATER

From within, an animal cry.

CUT TO:

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

DAUPHIN is stone still, cowering in the shadows. He hears the scream, echoing down the corridor. His face contorts in empathetic pain.

CUT TO:

INT. PITOU'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

PITOU desperately covers his ears with his hands, but he can't ward off the sound.

CUT TO:

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

Wrapped tightly in bed--like a moth in a cocoon--CLEANTE hears his Master, and lets loose with a blood-curdling scream of his own.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CUT TO:

INT. OUTSIDE THE OPERATING THEATER - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER stands against the wall, fighting for breath. The procedure is finished. Exhausted, his face cracks into sobs, and he slides to the floor. He stares at his down at his vestments; they're stained in blood.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - CONTINUOUS

The DOCTOR is knee-deep in paperwork; COULMIER bursts into the room.

COULMIER
The Marquis' protestations were so great that he prolonged his own pain. Here's proof of our success.

He slams a small tin box down on the DOCTOR's desk. The DOCTOR looks up at COULMIER, surprised.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
My, my.

The DOCTOR--his curiosity piqued--reaches to touch the box. Might it really contain the MARQUIS' tongue? He thinks better of it, and withdraws his hand.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
You have exceeded my expectations.

COULMIER
And my own.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
How is the patient faring?

COULMIER
Poorly. It was a crude surgery, roughly handled. And the Marquis' current quarters...the cold earth, the rats and the dank air...well, they're hardly conducive to recovery, sir.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And you? It must've been an ordeal.

CONTINUED:

COULMIER
At first, it was unbearable. But then my horror hardened into resolve. Steel purpose.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Oh?

COULMIER
I'm not the first man God has asked to shed blood in His name. And I will not be the last.

COULMIER abruptly turns to go.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Will you sleep soundly tonight?

COULMIER falters.

COULMIER
No, sir. Plainly put, I never expect to sleep again.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PIT - THAT NIGHT

The MARQUIS lies half-conscious in chains. His head rolls from the right to the left, and a moonbeam catches the gleaming white color of the bandage, which is tied tightly across his mouth.

CUT TO:

EXT. A MANSION IN THE HEART OF SAINT MAURICE - EVENING

Carriages pull up to the entrance of an elegant neoclassical mansion. Out step a high-society menagerie: graceful SWANS, stout HORSES, rotund PIGS and bespectacled GOATS. Everyone is masked.

INT. AN ELEGANT BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

A WOMAN enters the room in grand fashion, wearing a beaked mask with an ostrich feather head-dress. On the landing, she's greeted by gasps of recognition and polite applause. She descends the steps.

Among the REVELLERS, DR. ROYER-COLLARD, with the sleek snout of a HUNTING DOG. He notices the WOMAN, and approaches. He offers his hand. She curtsies, and takes it. They glide

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

elegantly onto the dance floor. They turn to the lilting melody of the harpsichord.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Your social schedule has markedly improved.

The WOMAN--none other than RENEE PELAGIE--smiles at him through the slits in her mask.

RENEE PELAGIE
And I have you to thank for it.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
(proudly)
Because we have--at long last--silenced your husband's muse.

RENEE PELAGIE
On the contrary. Because he has received such atrocious treatment at your hands.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I beg your pardon?

RENEE PELAGIE
He's turned from monster to martyr overnight. There are those who swear that your action against my husband exceeded his prose.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I don't believe you.

RENEE PELAGIE
You know how people gossip. "Did you hear? They bled the Marquis with a hundred leeches." Or better still, "They broke his fingers so he couldn't hold his quill!" Why, it smacks of the Terror! And so they rally to my side. An invitation proffered in my direction has become proof positive of a *liberal* heart!

The DOCTOR dips RENEE PELAGIE, as he whispers:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I must be plain with you, Madame. Do you intend legal action against me?

RENEE PELAGIE
Don't be absurd; I owe you lasting appreciation.

CONTINUED: (2)

She whispers wickedly in his ear:

RENEE PELAGIE (CONT'D)
I expect to dine out on his name and your barbarity for some time!

She laughs, gaily.

RENEE PELAGIE (CONT'D)
My only regret is that his turnabout may cost you dearly. People will not be predisposed to offer their support to a hospital so sorely besmirched. And when the story leaks to Paris, and the Ministry launches its investigation... *well.*

The orchestra pauses a moment. RENEE applauds politely; the DOCTOR looks less steady.

RENEE PELAGIE (CONT'D)
Public scorn carries a terrible sting, Doctor. Trust me; I'm a woman who knows.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Nonsense. My reputation is as solid as the very walls of Charenton herself.

RENEE PELAGIE
I dare you. *Take off your mask.*

The DOCTOR pauses. He glances around, then decides to accept the challenge. He takes a step onto the center of the dance floor, and doffs his mask.

A GENTLEMAN in a LION HEADDRESS notices the DOCTOR, and approaches, parting the crowd.

LION MASK
Pardon me, sir. Are you Antoine-Athanase Royer-Collard, of the Charenton Asylum?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Indeed I am.

LION MASK
I'd like to offer a message on behalf of the Marquis.

The LION MASK throws his drink into the DOCTOR's face.

CONTINUED: (3)

LION MASK (CONT'D)
Rumor has it, he can no longer speak for himself.

One person applauds, then two. A few party-goers start chanting:

BULL MASK
Vive l'artiste!

GOOSE MASK
Vive le Marquis!

A REVELLER leans over and swipes the DOCTOR's mask off the floor. He thrusts it high in the air. The CROWD begins to hiss, then bark. The sound grows, like a hostile storm. The DOCTOR glares at RENEE PELAGIE, then bolts out of the party.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHARNEL HOUSE - MEANWHILE

Lining the walls, the tombs of the dead. On a slab in the center lies MADELEINE, draped in white silk.

There's a creak as the door opens. COULMIER enters the crypt. He approaches the body, and places a wreath of newly-cut flowers at MADELEINE's head. He kneels at her feet to pray. He pulls out his rosary. In a voice choking with emotion, he mumbles:

COULMIER
"In nomine patris et filii et spiritu santu..."

A bead of sweat trickles down COULMIER's face. He takes the hem of MADELEINE's death shroud, and wipes the droplet away. The shroud slides off the tip of MADELEINE's face. She lies dormant. Her skin is rosy, and her lips are slightly parted.

Unable to resist, COULMIER tugs the shroud off further. Now, MADELEINE is exposed to the neck. COULMIER notices her breasts, sloping beneath the fabric.

Impulsively, COULMIER pulls the shroud all the way off. MADELEINE lies before him, flawless. There are no wounds, no sign of the gore which accompanied her death.

COULMIER can feel his heart pounding like a kettle drum. He circles the body. With his finger, he touches her lips. He hesitates, then he leans down to kiss her. It's an almost chaste moment, but it stuns her awake. MADELEINE lives.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COULMIER leaps back, alarmed. But MADELEINE reaches out, and wraps her arms around his neck. She returns the kiss, passionately.

MADELEINE
Oh, Abbe. Let me taste in death what in life modesty so cruelly forbade...

He crawls astride her on the slab. Soon, he's running his hands in and out of her rounded thighs, feeling each hollow, each moist crevice.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)
Ah!

CLOSE UP: COULMIER

His face grimaces with pleasure as he enters her. His eyes light on the crucifix hanging across from him on the wall.

ANGLE ON: THE CRUCIFIX

CHRIST's forehead is pierced through with nettles, and blood flows in tiny rivers down his face. He seems to be staring directly at COULMIER.

ANGLE ON: COULMIER

COULMIER shudders, and glances down at the body beneath him.

COULMIER'S POV:

The lifeless corpse of MADELEINE, bearing the wounds which killed her, desecrated, on the cold marble. COULMIER tries to stay the bile, rising in his throat.

SFX: LOUD KNOCKING

ABRUPT CUT TO:

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

COULMIER's eyes bolt open from a deep sleep. He sits upright. Trembling, he crawls to the foot of his bed, and steadies himself by grasping the post.

He catches sight of his own face in the mirror across the room. It's ghostly pale.

The KNOCKING continues.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALCOUR (O.S.)
Father, please. You'd best come quick. It's the Marquis.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

VALCOUR and COULMIER move down the hall like bullets down the barrel of a gun.

INT. THE PIT - CONTINUOUS

VALCOUR unlocks the wrought-iron gate, and they enter. Gasping for breath, VALCOUR covers his face with a handkerchief. He raises his lantern.

VALCOUR
Aw, Christ.

In the dimly lit dungeon--flickering orange--words. Everywhere, words. On the ceiling. Written on the floor. Etched on the walls. It's as if the TWO MEN have stumbled into the tomb of Tutankhamen, with its glyphic texts, or a Sanskrit monument covered in symbols.

VALCOUR (CONT'D)
He spat into his own filth. Made himself a kind of paint.

COULMIER stares, awe-struck. He can't help but be impressed; the effort is nothing less than Herculean.

COULMIER
Dear God.

He glances down to the pit's base. There, the MARQUIS lies, his face pale and his breathing shallow. Still--in spite of his decrepitude--there's the look of triumph in his eyes. A look which says, "I persevered."

COULMIER rushes to him. He feels for his heart-beat; it's faint. The MARQUIS tries to speak, but the bandage prevents him. He can only murmur. COULMIER calls up to VALCOUR.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Free his mouth.

VALCOUR
Mustn't do that, sir.

COULMIER
I must grant him his last rites. To do that, he must swear an oath, and kiss the cross.

CONTINUED:

VALCOUR
I don't take my orders from you; I take 'em from the Doctor.

COULMIER
You'd deny a dying man his salvation, rather than disobey the Doctor? That makes you a very small man, Valcour.

Sullenly, VALCOUR tosses his knife down to the ground. COULMIER tenderly cradles the MARQUIS' head in his lap, and mops his brow.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
That's the way now; hold on. I failed to save your soul in life; I won't fail in death.

COULMIER takes the knife and delicately snips the muslin; it falls away. Slowly, painfully, the MARQUIS parts his lips. He coughs for air. He tries to speak, but--sans his tongue--he can't form words.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Shhh...shhh...

COULMIER begins to pray softly:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Dear Heavenly Father. Prove Your infinite mercy, and open Your gates to this man, no less Your child than any other.

COULMIER kisses the MARQUIS' forehead.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
There is...in each of us...such beauty... and such abomination. No man is exempt. Forgive him. Forgive us all.

The MARQUIS tries to smile, ever so slightly. COULMIER smiles, too, his eyes brimming with tears. The old affection between the two men is still evident, even now.

COULMIER removes the small ivory crucifix from around his neck; he places it delicately over the MARQUIS's mouth.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
There now. Kiss the cross.

There's a sudden flicker of life in the MARQUIS's eyes; a remnant of his old self. He opens his mouth savagely, and grabs the crucifix in his teeth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Oh, good God. You are the Devil!

COULMIER tries to wrest it out, but the MARQUIS clamps down even tighter with his teeth. The chain breaks, and rosary beads go streaming across his face, bouncing across the stone floor. With concerted effort--almost gagging--*the MARQUIS swallows.* COULMIER watches, appalled. Finally--with a last gulp--the crucifix goes down. The MARQUIS has ingested Christ.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
NOOOOOOOOO!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STREETS OF CHARENTON - MEANWHILE

The DOCTOR's carriage careens down the road at break-neck speed.

INT. CORRIDOR - HOURS LATER

The DOCTOR, still in his evening clothes, barrels down the hall. VALCOUR follows.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
We'll broker his release from Charenton.

VALCOUR
But sir--

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
We'll transfer him to a proper hospital, so he'll recover from his wounds. Anything we might do to make amends for our ...*unorthodox*...course of treatment.

INT. THE PIT - CONTINUOUS

The gate to the pit stands wide open. DR. ROYER-COLLARD frowns, as if to say "That's odd." He looks at VALCOUR, who shrugs sheepishly.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD fortifies himself and steps inside. He stops short and stares in horror at the sight below.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
No. It can't be...it musn't be...

The MARQUIS lies on the floor of the pit, dead, his limbs splayed like a starfish. He stares at the DOCTOR with a

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

blank gaze; his pupils have rolled into his lids, so his eyes are pure white.

CUT TO:

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

He sleeps in a bare room; at the foot of his bed, a suitcase. The door is kicked open. COULMIER's startled awake. In the darkness, TWO HEAVY FIGURES roust him from bed.

COULMIER
(calling for help:)
Valcour! VALCOUR!

The TWO SHADOWY MEN slam him up against the wall, and shackle him.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Who are you, and in God's name, what is it you want?

VOICE
You're under arrest.

COULMIER
(bristling:)
Would it be impertinent to ask *why?*

VOICE
Cold-blooded murder. That reason enough for you?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ROYAL CABINET - THE NEXT DAY

A MOB has amassed outside the municipal building. They shout insults as COULMIER is hustled into the building by POLICE.

ANGRY CITIZENS
Monster! Murderer! Assassin!

INT. THE ROYAL CABINET - A SHORT WHILE LATER

DR. ROYER-COLLARD holds court before the MINISTRY. In the seat of judgement, MONSIEUR DELBENÉ. Sitting at a table before the TRIBUNAL, surrounded by GUARDS with his feet in chains, the ABBE de COULMIER.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
I have rooted out the evil at Charenton, as promised, gentlemen. And no one was more surprised than I to discover that
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (cont'd)
it's true practitioner was not the Marquis; it was, in fact, the priest who cared for him.

COULMIER glares at the DOCTOR, who averts his gaze and continues:

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
It wouldn't surprise me if--once or twice-- he smuggled the books out himself. Maybe he hid them under his vestments--

COULMIER can't hold back; he leaps to his feet. The GUARDS do, too, in response.

COULMIER
Slander! Perjury! Lies!

MONSIEUR DELBENÉ pounds his gavel.

DELBENÉ
(to Coulmier:)
You do yourself little service with these outbursts.
(to Dr. Royer-Collard:)
And you'd best stick to the matter at hand. A motive for the Marquis' murder.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The Abbe shared a flirtation, it seems, with a certain chambermaid, Madeleine Leclerc--

COULMIER
Is this permissible? This *conjecture?*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
It was the talk of Charenton. Valcour, our prefect, even witnessed a late-night visit she paid to his chambers---

COULMIER
I'm a priest! I'd be defrocked!

DELBENÉ
It may come to worse than that, Father.
(to the Doctor:)
Continue.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The Abbe blamed the Marquis for her unfortunate death. And so he sought a lover's revenge--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

COULMIER
That's preposterous!

Again, DELBENÉ calls for order by pounding his gavel. When it's quiet, DR. ROYER-COLLARD continues.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
After depriving the Marquis of all his worldly goods, the Abbe was driven to more ingenious modes of torture.

The DOCTOR's lips curl down in distaste.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
When he came for the Marquis' quills, he was green. A novice. But when he severed his tongue, he did so with all the calm malevolence of a DeSadean protagonist.

COULMIER
(to the DOCTOR)
You incited my every action!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
The Marquis incited your action; not I.

COULMIER
DID YOUR URGING EVER FALTER?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
(a nervous laugh:)
My, my. Interred too long with the beast, you've now become one!

COULMIER
IF I AM A VICIOUS CUR, THEN YOU ARE SURELY MY MASTER!

DELBENÉ
GENTLEMAN, PLEASE!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
What other recourse did I have, but to order his arrest?

COULMIER
(to Delbené:)
THIS IS A TRAVESTY!

DELBENÉ
Silence, or you'll be removed!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Most shocking, gentlemen...most perverse...he cloaked his actions under the guise of *moral vigilance.*

COULMIER, beside himself now, pleads to the entire ASSEMBLY:

COULMIER
Need I remind you that the Marquis' work was immoral! That it polluted the minds of its hapless readers, and even cost the life of a child! And that it was your directive, gentleman, as the highest body in the land, that we censor him at any cost!

COULMIER has cowed them all into silence; no one answers.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
Has public sentiment so swayed you? Are you already rewriting your own history?

Finally, DELBENÉ responds.

DELBENÉ
The question before us is a simple one. Did you nurture an unwholesome interest in the girl, as the Doctor claims?

COULMIER
No. I did not.

DELBENÉ glances at the DOCTOR, unconvinced. DR. ROYER-COLLARD raises an eyebrow.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
(fighting for his life:)
There are absolutes, sir, which exist beyond the scope of personal feeling! Perhaps I cared for her; perhaps I didn't. There is still right, and wrong! Good and evil! All morality is not self-interest; only the Marquis would suggest otherwise! *Tell me, I beg you, is this our world or his?*

Stunned by his own outburst, COULMIER composes himself. He says simply and strongly:

COULMIER
I was driven by my conscience, and my God.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MONSIEUR DELBENÉ stares down at the PRIEST from on high.

DELBENÉ
The thrill was a mere dividend?

This stops COULMIER cold, like a slap in the face.

COULMIER
I am not the man the Doctor would have you believe. I did not relish punishing the Marquis.

Slowly, deliberately, he starts to unbutton his vestments. Shocked murmurs from the ASSEMBLY.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
I even sought to pay for his flesh with my own.

He slips the robe off his shoulder, and it falls. His back and chest are a maze of scars, some old, others newly applied.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
"Surely," I thought, "if I can weather pain equal to that which I inflicted, I will be forgiven."

Even DR. ROYER-COLLARD turns away; the sight is too much.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
I am still waiting for God's answer.

The room hangs on COULMIER's every word. Tears stream down his cheeks. In a quiet voice filled with self-doubt:

COULMIER (CONT'D)
But even He has abandoned me now.

The MINISTERS glance at one another, and shift uncomfortably in their seats.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE OF DR. ROYER-COLLARD - DAYS LATER

Sunlight spills through the window. Sitting before the DOCTOR, ABBE de RICHARD, a youthful priest with a face filled with optimism.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Welcome to Charenton, Abbe de Richard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ABBE DE RICHARD
Thank you, sir.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
This is not a place for the feeble, or the weak of will.

ABBE DE RICHARD
My years tending to the lepers in St. Emilion steeled me for life's grisliest offerings, Doctor.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - A SHORT WHILE LATER

DR. ROYER-COLLARD leads ABBE DE RICHARD down the labyrinthine passage to the pit.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
There is one patient above all who requires our vigilant attention.

INT. THE PIT - CONTINUOUS

ABBE DE RICHARD makes his way into the depths, adjusting to the loss of light as he descends.

Sitting at the base of the pit, he can barely make out a figure: it's a MAN, chained by the neck and crouched on all fours. From the darkness, he speaks:

VOICE
Come closer, Father. Don't be afraid.

ABBE DE RICHARD takes a hesitant step toward the FIGURE. The VOICE turns to an urgent, confidential whisper.

VOICE (CONT'D)
I have such horrendous truths to impart, and no one in the world to tell them to. I'll need reams of parchment and gallons of ink besides.

Now--for the first time--ABBE de RICHARD can see the CAPTIVE's face. It's COULMIER.

COULMIER (CONT'D)
And--yes, of course--a quill. If you'd be so kind, Father...as to bring me a quill....

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COULMIER smiles a crooked smile; there's an impish glint in his eye. ABBE DE RICHARD shudders in the dank air.

INT. CORRIDOR - SECONDS LATER

DR. ROYER-COLLARD and ABBE DE RICHARD barrel onward, continuing their tour. In the distance, COULMIER rattles his chains and bellows:

COULMIER (O.S.)
A quill! A quill! *A QUILL!*

Abruptly, the TWO MEN turn the corner.

INT. ANOTHER CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

ABBE DE RICHARD all but runs to keep pace with the DOCTOR.

ABBE DE RICHARD
At St. Emilion, the brothers made cheese. Have you industry here?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Indeed we do.

They pause outside a set of heavy iron doors.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
At Charenton, each man must work for his keep.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD swings open the doors for the ABBE DE RICHARD. The YOUNG PRIEST is met with an astonishing sight.

INT. THE ASYLUM WORK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The place is a-buzz with the sound of industry. At long tables, an industrious group of LUNATICS--CLEANTE and PITOU among them--are setting type. Their fingers are stained with printer's ink.

The GROUNDSKEEPER ORVOLLE turns the wheels on a giant printing press. Pages spew forth with lightning speed. The title page grinds out; it reads OPUS SADICUM.

ABBE DE RICHARD
You're publishing the Marquis?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Anonymously, of course.

CONTINUED:

ABBE DE RICHARD
Isn't that the very catastrophe you sought to prevent?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
And now it is our only recourse.

ABBE DE RICHARD
Against what?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD
Our ruination. Our charitable endowment has shrivelled to a mere pittance. But with profits from the sale of his books, Charenton will rise like the proverbial Phoenix.

At a near-by table, FRANVAL and DAUPHIN, their aprons sticky with glue, are binding the books.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
The compulsive patients set the type, and the listless ones do the binding.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD picks up a handsomely finished copy. He feels its heft. He passes it to ABBE DE RICHARD.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD (CONT'D)
It's futile to resist. Go ahead. I dare you.

ABBE DE RICHARD glances down at the book in his hands. He cracks it. Slowly, inevitably, he begins to read. Once more, we hear the tell-tale VOICE of the story's AUTHOR:

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)
"Dear Reader...It now falls upon me, your chaperone through the dark waters of the soul, to impart a tale of such mirthless cruelty and moral torpor that I can barely bring my voice above a whisper....

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - DAWN

Against a blood-red sky, DR. ROYER-COLLARD flings open the heavy iron gates.

One by one--each with a loud whip crack--FIVE BLACK CARRIAGES bolt from the place. They start charging across the horizon, toward points unknown.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)
(with a low giggle)
So come...perch upon my knee, so you don't miss a word..."

The rear door of the last carriage swings ajar. Inside, we see crates of books, piled high, destined to sell across France and beyond. The wheel on the carriage skids over a rock, and a single copy falls from the stack; it lands on the ground.

CLOSE UP: THE WAYWARD COPY OF "OPUS SADICUM"

The book still lies splayed on the ground; a fierce wind opens its cover. The pages flicker past in the breeze.

The final page, trembling in the gale, ready to be ripped at any moment from its binding, bears the words:

THE END